

UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Unlocking the Potential of Learning Communities in
Academic and Business Contexts: Australian and Chinese
Case Studies

by

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B.A., M.Ed., M.Ed. (Hons.)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania

AUSTRALIA

December 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research journey of academic pursuit, which commenced more than four years ago, would never have been possible without the involvement of many individuals, groups, communities, institutions to whom tremendous acknowledgements must be expressed, though indescribable in words alone.

First and foremost I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my supervisor Professor John Williamson for his kindness, thoughtfulness and the breadth and generosity of knowledge to open my mind to many possibilities and allowing me the freedom to pursue research of my life-long interest. I am indebted to what Professor Williamson has imparted to me over the past few years towards the core of the doctoral learning community, which was both invaluable and inspirational.

I am exceedingly grateful to Professor Ian Hay who provided me with valuable insight and warmth support through this challenging yet rewarding research journey, in particular his professional guidance for the quantitative portion of this research project. His tremendous caring made my learning process not only entirely encouraged but also highly motivated and piercingly engaged by a sense of belonging within a faculty learning community.

My sincere appreciation is also extended to the executives and staff of universities and companies in both Australia and China who put aside the intense demands of their work to participate in the surveys and interviews in this study at various stages but kept anonymous. Without their cooperation the research data upon which this thesis is based would not existed.

Appreciation is also due to my doctoral colleagues whom I feel privileged to accompany with. For the years they have worked with me alongside each other we became an authentic learning community of learners, dedicated to making sense about research. Special thanks to Sun Hee Jang, my valued friend, who lifted me up with a beacon of light during my time often filled with uncertainty and difficulty.

Last, yet most significantly, I would like to wholeheartedly thank my beloved parents Zhimin Yang (杨志敏) and Yulin Wang (王玉琳), whom I owe more than what I can give back to them. They made a tremendous sacrifice yet showed undying support and faithfulness to my scholarly endeavours to the full.

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘learning community’ is one that has been broadly or narrowly defined depending on its context. It is now widely used in a range of settings, from schools and universities, to business work places, by many researchers (see, for example, Brown & Duguid, 1991; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011). While the term has slipped into common – often idiosyncratic – usage a review of the literature highlights how the meaning of learning community has evolved over time, reinforcing the need to investigate more rigorously how practitioners in different contexts understand their situation as a learning community. As understood commonly now a ‘learning community’ is more than just a group of people who simply work together in the same space, but what are its essential features and how are these perceived by those involved?

This study addressed the broad question: how do practitioners in Australia and China perceive their work places as ‘learning communities’? It sought to do so by examining six criteria of a successful learning community synthesised and operationalised from the literature. These criteria were

- (i) the perceptions of shared mission, vision, values and goals;
- (ii) the demonstration of commitment to continuous improvement;
- (iii) initiatives that develop and sustain a collaborative culture and collective enquiry;
- (iv) feelings of supportive and shared leadership;
- (v) perceived freedom of group membership and;
- (vi) the descriptions of proximity and mutual engagement.

Data collection methods included a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques consisting of document analysis, a questionnaire and a face-to-face interview with volunteers. A total sample number of 70 participants was recruited

opportunistically and purposefully (Burns, 2000) from two known university academic departments in Australia (AU) and China (CU), and two business organisations in Australia (AB) and China (CB). The sample frame was not intended to represent the whole population of academic or business stakeholders in the two countries. However, for the scope of this study this sample gave valuable insights into the degree of ‘learning community’ perceptions of stakeholders in two universities and two business organisations that are not examined by other learning community studies.

The unique data in this study attempted to fill a significant gap in the literature, where learning community studies have focused primarily on single cases, by exploring learning communities that operate in two universities and two businesses in Australia and China respectively. This allowed a two-by-two comparison of ways in which learning communities operate in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary institutions by addressing how practitioners construct meaning about team work, common tasks, sharing and flexibility of role relationships. A greater understanding of different stakeholders’ perceptions could impact where, why, and how the learning community concept will be utilised within their institutions.

Among the important findings from the study was that the role of national culture, reflecting historic-socio-political influences, was central in understanding respondents’ perceptions of the six constituent elements listed previously. On the other hand, there were cross-cultural and interdisciplinary similarities in the way stakeholders reported their perceptions of their working environment as a learning community, which reflected many interconnected issues inherent in the data. These data suggested that a more nuanced picture of ‘learning community’ needs to be taken into account when looking at particular instances or assertions about the operation of a learning community.

This study will be of interest to researchers, practitioners working at the interface of Education, Management, and Organisational Development, and especially those interested in the work lives of academics or employees, policy development

and implementation. More generally, the study will allow those who have utilised the term ‘learning community’ to describe and talk about their own workplaces to consider more critically the essence of what they are seeing.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Setting the Stage

Chapter 1 sets the stage for this thesis in the context of learning community practice, by providing background knowledge of the research topic, the origins and definitions of terms, the focus of the research, an overview of the research methodology, and the significance of the study, together with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

This thesis, titled *Unlocking the Potential of Learning Communities in Academic and Business Contexts: Australian and Chinese Case Studies*, evolved through the research journey in which practitioners in higher education and business organisations in the two countries were invited to be involved, and described the way in which and how their perceptions of workplace learning open up unique opportunities for the study of learning communities and their practice.

Background of the Research

The term ‘learning community’ can be defined either broadly or narrowly depending on its context. It is a term now widely used in education settings as varied as schools and universities; or, in other institutions, e.g., business work places, by many researchers (see, for example, Brown & Duguid, 1991; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). Within each of the discourses, there are also distinct traditions in theory. Theorists, researchers, and scholars view the world from different landscapes in terms of the nature of ‘learning’ and ‘community’ itself, each of which has underpinned differently the idea of a ‘learning community’, and all of which has implications for the concept of ‘learning community’, as a post-industrial society or ‘knowledge society’ begins to unfold.

Key Terms: Learning and Community

This chapter starts by reviewing two key words, ‘learning’ and ‘community’,

defining them generally as they contribute to the term ‘learning community’, as well as defining them in ways that show how they are used to comprehend and conceptualise the use of ‘learning community’ in the context of this study.

The meaning of ‘learning’

Undoubtedly, views about learning over the recent past have been characterised by tremendous innovation and change. In psychology, the notion of learning is defined as “any process through which experience at one time can alter an individual’s behaviour at a future time” (Gray, 2011, p. 93). The psychological definitions of learning underpinned educational theories in understanding learning. There have been extensive discussions, research and literature about the shift from behaviourism, through cognitivism, to constructivism in education (see, for example, Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Theories of learning were based on behaviourism as conceptualised by such educational psychologists as Briggs, Gagne, Skinner and Mager during the mid-twentieth century. However, the prevailing behaviourist paradigm had been increasingly debated by cognitive psychologists arguing that learning was viewed as a process of knowledge construction through interaction. As part of the educational shift, social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) emerged from the cognitive perspective, emphasizing learning-by-doing, reflection, or situated cognition. In short, educational definitions of learning tended to draw three major theoretical stances, namely (i) behaviourist (or associationist/empiricist) perspective where learning is defined as an activity, (ii) cognitive (or rationalist) where learning is defined as achieving understanding, and (iii) situative (or pragmatist/sociohistoric) perspective where learning is defined as social practice. Learning theories are also frequently captured in other institutional worlds, which often emphasise a particular business case. The concept of learning in business was equated with “expanding the ability to produce the results we truly want in life” (Senge, 1994, p. 127), positioning learning at the heart of what it means to be human:

Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never

were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life. There is within each of us a deep hunger for this type of learning (Senge, 2006, pp. 13-14).

Therefore, learning is contemporarily considered as a lifelong process that also occurs in the actual professional workplace context through practice, which has led to increasing recognition and validation beyond the realm of educational institutions. As noted by Eraut, Alderton, Cole and Senker (2000), practitioners place high value on seeking learning opportunities while practising work is significant for the degree and quality of learning in the workplace. Learning triggered by particular work requirements and real problems is what most practitioners nominate as the most important contribution to their learning (Australian National Training Authority, 2003). However, professional work-based learning is not only about meeting formal requirements or solving problems. It is also about knowledge practices of self-empowerment in which professionals engage in processes of development and further production of profession-generated knowledge on an ongoing basis. Learning has thus been extended beyond the individual's learning engagement to encompass other members, which places learning in a context of 'community'.

The origins of the concept 'community'

At the cornerstone of the concept of learning community is the definition of the term 'community'. Historically, the term 'community' itself has been depicted as a sophisticated multi-faceted and highly controversial subject, spanning various disciplines. In biology, a community comprises a group of plants and animals growing or living in the same place or environment. In ecology, community refers to the structure of relationships through which a localised population provides its daily requirements (Hawley, 1950). In sociology, the concept of community was first coined by the German sociologist Tönnies who described a community and society (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* in German, respectively). Tönnies (1988)

contended that the concept of community in German (Gemeinschaft) “should be understood as a living organism” (p. 35), in which “all intimate, private and exclusive living together, so we discover, is understood as life in Gemeinschaft (community)” (p. 33). He summarised three main forms of communities. These were 1) the community of blood (kinship); 2) the community of place (neighborhood) or “community of physical life”; and 3) spirit or “community of mental life” (friendship):

The true cement of unity and, consequently, of the possibility of a community lays, firstly, on the narrowness of the consanguineous relation and blood mixing; secondly, on the physical proximity and lastly – to human beings – on the intellectual proximity. One must seek the sources of all kind of understanding in this gradation (p. 47).

The use of the term community in German (Gemeinschaft) in this way has resulted in widely divergent interpretations from country to country, and the term community has begun to be introduced to other languages that do not have such a word with broad connotative and denotative meaning. For example, a number of Chinese scholars from the sociology department at YenChing University (now Beijing University) attempted to find a Chinese equivalent to the English word/term (Ding, 2008) in the 1930s after the German word ‘Gemeinschaft’ came to mean the English word ‘community’. In 1932, the American sociologist Robert Park was invited to lecture at the Sociology Department of YenChing University, arguing that “community is not society”. The Chinese term ‘shequ’ thereafter was first developed by Fei Hsiao Tung and his colleagues to interpret the English word community (Ding, 2008).

Similarly, the term community in English speaking countries also sparked an intensely critical debate and deliberation, which has led to varied theoretical understandings, each of which is treated differently with different shades of meaning. For example, the American sociologist Hillary (1955) identified and compared ninety-four definitions of community in his paper ‘Definitions of

Community: Areas of agreement', in which, however, the agreed meaning of community appears to be rather vague. As stated by Hillary (1955) "there is no complete agreement as to the nature of community" (p. 119). This hardly seems very encouraging, as evidenced by Bell and Newby (1971) who argued that "Hillary's conclusion hardly seemed to advance the analysis much further" (p. 27). Bell and Newby (1971) concluded that community is not just an empirical description but also a normative prescription:

most sociologists seem to have weighed in with their own idea of what a community consists of ... the subjective feelings that the term community conjures up thus frequently lead to a confusion between what it is (empirical description) and what the sociologist feels it should be (normative prescription) (p. 21).

More recently, Allan and Phillipson (2008) stated that "as a concept, 'community' seemed to be too infused with prescription and ideology to be useful analytically" (p. 1).

Table 1.1 presents a number of sociologists' efforts by comparing various definitions – through providing a brief overview of studies. More extant literature on the notion of 'community' are summarised in Appendix A.

The brief review of definitions was based on the examination of renowned researchers from the 1950s to the present and seeks to extend the concept of community to take into account the contemporary views (see, for example, Brint, 2001; Riel & Polin, 2004), that provide a contrast to the early literature (see, for example, Bell & Newby, 1971; Hawley, 1950; Sussman, 1959).

The early representative definitions of community were based on sociology (see, for example, Hillary, 1955; Poplin, 1979), and across other various disciplinary divides, for example, in Ecology (Hawley, 1950); in Psychology (McMillan & Chavis, 1986); in network community (Kim, 2000); in learning communities (Riel & Polin, 2004), and in Biomedicine (P. A. Marshall & Berg, 2006).

Table 1.1

Brief Summary of Definitions of 'Community'

Researcher	Definition	Key elements
Hawley (1950, p. 180)	"Formally defined, community refers to the structure of relationships through which a localized population provides its daily requirements ... It is, in fact, the least reducible universe within which ecological phenomena may be adequately observed ... The community, then, is the basic unit of ecological investigation"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure of relations • localised population • reducible universe • basic unit
Sussman (1959, pp. 1-2)	"A community is said to exist, when interaction between individuals has the purpose of meeting individual needs & obtaining group goals ... the features of social interaction, structures for the gratification of physical, social and psychological needs & limited geographical area, are basic to the definition of community"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction between individuals • meeting needs • obtaining group goals • social interaction
McMillan & Chavis (1986, p. 9)	"Members have a belonging, members matter to one another and to the group and a shared faith that member's needs will be met through their commitment to be together"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belonging • matter to each other • shared faith • commitment together
Kim (2000, p. 28)	"A community is a group of people with a shared interest, purpose or goal, who get to know each other better over time"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group of people • share interest, purpose or goal • know each other better over time
Riel & Polin (2004, p. 18)	"A multigenerational group of people, at work or play, whose identities are defined in large part by the roles they play and relationships they share in that group activity"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • groups of people • define identities • play roles • share relationships
Marshall & Berg (2006, pp. 28-29)	"Communities represent groups of individuals with collective interests, a common identity, or a shared history"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • groups of individuals • collective interests • common identity • shared history
Samah & Aref (2011, p. 187)	"A social unit where the locality in which they reside is an integral part; within which members interact together to do things and to achieve what they want"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people • area • interaction • interest

The various definitions reported above so far represent just a snapshot of how the concept of community is being deconstructed by dominant ideological notions and shaped by a number of key components in the term. However, it can be concluded that these concepts are strongly linked by the presence of a group of people, which is consistent with Hillery's statement that "all of the definitions deal with people" (p. 117). Hillery (1955) also reported that in his review sixty-nine of the ninety-four definitions seem to share some similar elements, of which, almost three-quarters agree on the 1) presence of area, 2) social interaction and 3) common ties. Poplin (1979) undertook a similar but a little larger meta-analysis of 125 sociological definitions of the term community, and concluded that while the term had changed in language and meaning over time, these three broad common elements of a community were still common. An analysis of the collected definitions in Appendix A also confirms these common elements constitute the definition of a community and, therefore, are reflected in the use of the term community.

Learning Community Practice

The idea of the learning community has gained considerable attention from higher education scholars and professional practitioners (Roth & Lee, 2006; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). This has led to an increase in the number of businesses organising the workforce into dyads, groups, networks and teams to boost productivity. Schools, universities and other academic institutions and research organisations have likewise followed the evolution of theories of learning in an effort to induct individuals into community practices at large.

In doing so, learning applies itself to the micro level of community practice such as teams or groups. For example, learning community is believed to promote students to actively learn and construct knowledge through a reciprocal process (Bruffee, 1999; Schon, 1995; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Learning communities evolve in universities where research scholars support each other in learning, while respecting and caring about each other's research, and change the dynamics of the

traditional professor lecturer relationship (Samaras, Adams-Legge et al., 2008). Learning community also avails itself in other organisations, such as social businesses and enterprises or professional associations, which provide environments in assisting human interaction and reciprocal workplace participation of the employees (Hara & Schwen, 2006; Moran & Weimer, 2004; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Learning also lends itself to the macro level of whole organisational practice. Learning is tightly integrated in organisational culture, values, leadership and management practice. A learning community thus became a learning organisation (Senge, 2006).

Learning Communities in Different Institutional Contexts

Learning communities may take a variety of forms. A review of contemporary practices indicates that learning communities may vary in purpose and in scope as they are operationalised in different institutional contexts. As supported and presented by Samaras, Freese, Kosnik, and Beck (2008) who edited a collection of papers contributed to learning communities in practice, “regardless of the setting – in schools, universities, and professional networks – community has a place and *is* the place where learning occurs” (p. xvii).

Learning Community Practice in Elementary and Secondary Schools

The operationalisation of learning communities has been developed in elementary and secondary schools in a wide variety of contexts in different cultures. For example, Hoban (2008) reported how an Australian elementary school learning community was initiated and developed to encourage teachers to share experiences by a novel teaching approach based on digital animation. I. Mitchell and J. Mitchell (2008) documented how a learning community in an Australian high school has developed by demonstrating examples of how teachers in their learning community have become “‘interdependent innovators’, problematising and reflecting on their practice, sharing concerns, creating new teaching ideas, and sharing failures and successes” (p. 9). Bell-Angus, Davis, Donohue, Maria

and McGlynn-Stewart (2008) reported the development and growth of a Canadian learning community where inquiries were pursued by a group of elementary, high school, and post-secondary teacher researchers to enrich learning.

Learning Community Practice in Higher Education

Learning communities have long been instituted in higher education. In studies of higher education, Lenning and Ebbers (1999) noted that both university students and faculty members benefit from working in learning communities. Their review of the research endorses the view that learning communities can be effective for increasing satisfaction with college life, improving collaboration and knowledge sharing among faculty colleagues, and renewing learning and teaching in university settings.

Since then, learning communities can now be found in “hundreds of colleges and universities, including two and four-year institutions and public and private colleges and universities” (B. L. Smith, 2004, p. viii) across the nation. The benefits received while participating in a learning community are well documented. For example, Freese and Strong (2008) examined a multicultural education classroom where a unique learning community was developed to create conditions that encouraged students and faculty to wrestle with and ‘unpack’ tensions related to openly discussing issues to arrive at new understandings in an American university classroom.

Learning Community Practice in Business or Professional Enterprises

In parallel, learning community practices have been brought to the forefront of business organisation and management. Samaras, Freese et al., (2008) text illustrated a set of papers where recent learning communities in professional networks practices that cross workplaces, “with members not necessarily working together on a regular basis” (p. 151). These practices have been described in the business literature on several decades. For example, Brown and Duguid (1991)

discussed learning communities based on Orr's ethnographic studies of service technicians in Xerox (Orr, 1987, 1990, 1996). Theories of learning were coupled with working and innovation to provide new insights into the role of learning communities in the workplace. Employees, who share stories as a form of learning, serve as an organisation's collective mind (Weick & Roberts, 1993) that can be easily communicated among employees in a learning community.

Fuller and Unwin (2005) examined the changing role of employees in the workplace with regard to their opportunities and desire for learning within the context of changing workforce requirements. It drew on the idea of learning community as starting points for examining the types of learning opportunities experienced by employees. They argued that contrasting forms of work organisation and approaches to managing employees are likely to generate different learning communities and opportunities for workplace learning. They concluded by calling for more empirical research to elucidate the correlation between learning and organisation and to shed further light on what and how different cohorts of employees learn in their workplaces.

Research Aim and Rationale

The overall aim of this present research was an attempt to contribute to the limited but ever-growing knowledge of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary understanding of learning community by examining the extent of stakeholders' perceptions on what constituted their sense of a learning community in their particular work context.

The underlying research rationale behind the aim of this study was driven by the diversity of learning community in theory, research and practice and its significance that emerged in the literature, among which, however, stakeholders' perceptions of participation and the roles that they play in learning communities were given perfunctory attention. Measuring different perceptions of learning communities, thus, can be a challenge, culturally and educationally.

The concept learning community is operationalised widely in different cultures and the understanding of their operationalisation varies a great deal as it is shaped by different perceptions, which need to be presented in the context of particular workplaces. The lack of research on stakeholders' perceptions of learning communities in education should concern schools and faculties seeking to examine how teachers, academic staff or researchers describe their workplaces as a learning community. For those who are responsible for operationalising learning communities, a greater understanding of different stakeholders' perceptions could impact where, why and how the learning community concept will be utilised within their educational institutions. The lack of research on practitioners' perceptions of learning communities in business and other professional organisations should also concern managers and administrators seeking to examine how a sense of learning community can be drawn from the documentation and depiction of their employees' workplaces. For those who are responsible for operationalising practitioners' learning communities, a greater understanding of the way their practitioners value their work contexts as a learning community could also impact on the extent to which the organisational learning is developed. This research, thus, was prompted by the above rationale and brought into the joint focus of attention in the context of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research, which was the very impetus for writing this dissertation.

This study sought to shed light on the criteria by which the attributes of learning community were specified and then evaluated comparatively, taking the diverse values and perceptions that exist along the lines of different cultures and disciplines into consideration. This, therefore, added cross-cultural and interdisciplinary understanding to extend the knowledge base of learning community.

The Scope of the Topic

The present study was based upon the conception that different cultures and different subject areas encode different perceptions in understanding learning community practices in professional workplace contexts, and these were often based upon stakeholders' values and beliefs about the meaning of learning community. This study, as an international one, was designed to examine the perceptions which reflected practitioners' knowledge, translated through the accounts of practitioners of their own belief and values, as they engaged in learning as members of a variety of learning communities explicitly or implicitly. Their perceptions, values, and practices were captured through cross-cultural lenses, in Australia and China, which involved stakeholders in similar disciplinary fields but different application contexts, namely university and business.

In short, the scope of this study included two universities and two businesses in each country, namely, an academic department from an Australian university, an academic department from a Chinese university, a department from an Australian business and a department from a Chinese business. Chinese organisations are located in an urban metropolitan city of China and Australian counterpart organisations are from a regional area of Australia.

The inclusion of multi-disciplinary sampling from two cultures enabled the collection of diverse learning perspectives from a range of stakeholders who were located in a range of geographic and workplace contexts to address the research questions.

Research Questions

This thesis is based on a study conducted in 2007-2012 with practitioners who worked as employees in four different employment contexts. To properly achieve the aforementioned aim of the current study, two main research questions and related sub-questions were formulated to design and structure this research project:

Research Question 1

How do stakeholders perceive their work contexts as a learning community?

- 1) Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions?
- 2) Are there institutional differences in stakeholder perceptions?

Research Question 2

How do stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria fit with criteria operationalised from the literature?

- 1) How do stakeholders perceive each of the developed criteria that define learning community?
- 2) Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions of learning community towards each of the developed criteria?
- 3) To what extent do the operationalised criteria fit stakeholders' perceptions?

Research Focus

As the overall aim of this study was, as stated above, an attempt to understand different stakeholders' perceptions of the criteria against which their sense of a learning community was shaped in their particular workplace contexts, specific research foci of this study (as detailed in the following) were deemed to be appropriate to address the above two central research questions.

The specific foci for this study were:

- 1) to identify criteria that define a learning community and to clarify the progress made in learning community research.

- 2) to investigate two cross-cultural groups of stakeholders' perceptions concerning their sense of a learning community in their particular work context; either academic or business.
- 3) to explore stakeholders' views regarding what can be done to facilitate learning community development.
- 4) to describe the practical issues that hinder learning community development.
- 5) to investigate the cross-cultural differences that may occur in the development of learning communities.
- 6) to identify the promising areas of learning community research.

Research Approach

In this study, a qualitative research approach guided by the interpretivist or constructivist epistemology was employed. This approach is characterised by descriptive analysis, thematic analysis and content analysis consideration not only of the individuals' accounts of the world in particular contexts but of the cultural and ideological positioning of a holistic phenomenon. It also allowed for an exploration of subjective individuals' own perceptions as being concerned with the constituent meanings of a 'learning community' and contestation around meaning rather than as quantitative or objective of the 'truths' (Clifford, 2010; Davies, 2008; Willig, 2008).

Within the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm of social knowledge construction upon which this research was based, data that emerged from multiple voices recounting participants' perceptions were collected and the results obtained from analysis were interpreted in ways that reflected participants' subjectivities on the phenomenon of their workplace learning. A descriptive and interpretive

account of a contemporary phenomenon – organisational workplace learning community, represents a qualitative research approach.

Research Design

A qualitative research approach determines the research design of this study that was categorised as a descriptive study (Isaac & Michael, 1997) of the current phenomenon of stakeholders' workplace learning in different cultural and social contexts, which in turn determines the data that were collected and the analysis of those data. Considering the phenomenon under which this study was conducted, the goal of the research enquiry that attempted to seek meaning in the phenomenon and make sense within the context was guided by employing a qualitative case study design (Stake, 2000, 2006). A rigorous research process, including the data collection, data analysis and data interpretation was designed to investigate "a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The ensuring research design of this study was to capture rich data that would provide a thick descriptive (Geertz, 1975; Stake, 2000) base of participant perceptions across four organisations from which understanding could be developed.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods

The study employed a multi-site, multi-person and multi-method approach to allow a methodological triangulation (Creene, 2006; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2005) in data collection and data analysis.

Data collection in relation to case study participants was accomplished through document analysis, survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview. Both survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview had been conducted during 2008-2010 in four different case sites, namely, an Australian university, a Chinese university, an Australian business and a Chinese business. The multi-faceted data collection method solicited both quantitative and qualitative data, which involved

a total of 70 completed usable survey questionnaires returned. As well, 14 interviews were carried out. By employing more than one data collection method (multi-method), surveying and interviewing different cohorts of stakeholders (multi-participant) in different institutions within two geographical countries (multi-site), a better understanding of the research phenomena being studied was drawn to enable more detailed accounts of stakeholders' perceptions to be compared for analysis, and also more confidence can be held in the objectiveness of the data.

As to the data analysis, quantitative data from forced response items gathered through the survey questionnaires were subject to both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses utilising SPSS Version 18.0. A number of univariate descriptive statistical tests, and some bivariate inferential testing for statistically significant differences and statistically significant correlation were undertaken to ascertain responses to each research question.

The analysis of qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews were underpinned by the theoretical models of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), thematic analysis (Creswell, 2011; Joffe & Yardley, 2004), and content analysis (Denscombe, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) using NVivo Version 9 .

The Limitation of the Research

Limitations are constraints upon the study that are acknowledged in order to avoid misrepresentation. Best and Kahn (2006) defined limitations as “those conditions beyond the control of the researcher that may place restrictions on the conclusion of the study and their application to other situations” (p. 39). In consideration of the above definition, the following limitations of the research apply.

First, the primary sources of data in this study were survey-questionnaires and interviews. Both of these are subject to common qualitative research problems of

reporting, individual bias, inaccurate recall of events, and the inability of the respondents to articulate clearly their opinions and ideas.

Second, the selection of target participants in this study was limited to an ‘Opportunity’ and ‘purposeful’ sampling (Burns, 2000) of practitioners in four organisations, and therefore, generalisation of results was not the aim of this study. The sampling methods employed in this study resulted in a sample from a relatively limited geographic range, and may not adequately represent the multi-ethnic, socially or economic complexity of the two countries. This limitation means it is not possible with confidence to expand the comparisons to other organisations across other geographic locations in Australia and China, and certainly not with confidence to other countries. For the scope of this study, it is intended to be four cases study documenting the degree of ‘learning community’ perceptions of practitioners in two universities and two business organisations. The data obtained in this study were not necessarily representative of the views of all employees in all university and business staff in their two country and departmental settings. The findings of the study may not be considered equally applicable in determining whether a different university or company at a different geographic location would ‘define’ a similar learning community. Therefore, the potential for generalisation of the results to other situations is limited by their similarity in context to this case study.

Third, the sampling methods utilised could be a further limitation that a relatively small number of participants were employed in this study. A total sample number of 70 respondents completed the survey-questionnaire. The resulting sample of survey participants resulted from a process over which the researcher had free choice or authority but which was not a random sample (Burns, 2000, pp. 85-88; Creswell, 2008, pp. 152-155; De Vaus, 2002, p. 70). Given that with the small non-random number of participants was statistically tested between groups, the expected outcome could be less precise, as it is generally accepted in research that,

the greater number of samples involved, the more powerful the statistical test becomes.

However, as previously stated, the limited sample does not lend itself to establish a representative of the world at large. Instead, it is sufficient for the aim of this study, representing a relatively ‘robust’ sample subject to the parametric data analysis and which will be justified in Chapter 3.

Fourth, the process of data gathering in this study employed mixed methods and data were obtained from four cohorts at different points in time. Another limitation concerned the issues of cost, distance and time, which restricted this study to instruments designed, data collection, interpretation, and analysis.

However, those limitations were contained, to some extent, by employing a multi-person, multi-site and multi-method approach (Burns, 2000).

Significance of the Research

This research is significant for the following reasons:

- it seeks to extend the literature on the development of learning communities in several ways.

First, little research in learning communities has utilised a theoretical lens to observe the complexity of what practitioners perceive in their particular workplace learning communities.

Second, the concept of learning community has received extensively favourable attention from researchers, but for the most part was drawn from research conducted and published in the West. A scan of the literature revealed no studies similar to the present research which was situated to allow a cross-cultural comparison between Australia and China. There is limited available literature that provides Australian

information and none identified that show the Australia in the cross-cultural context proposed here.

Third, in the same vein, the investigation of the Chinese context also gives prominence to a group of Chinese practitioners who have been less widely researched, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. The study therefore is grounded in the absence of Australian or Chinese literature-based evidence to further our understanding of the concept ‘learning community’ in a cross-cultural perspective.

Fourth, this study seeks to extend the literature on the development of learning communities by shedding light on interdisciplinary boundaries. Although the concept of ‘learning community’ is widely used in diverse fields such as Education, Psychology, and Organisational Development, much of the impetus for the learning community research originated in academia and it well grounded in educational theory and practice (see, for example, Lenning & Ebberts, 1999; Moran & Weimer, 2004; Pea, 1993; Salomon, 1993). A search of the literature on learning community also reveals a broad range of available research in the business and organisational worlds (see, for example, Senge, 1990, on learning organisation). Recent studies, however, focusing almost exclusively upon a single organisational context or a simple homogeneous comparative research, are no longer fully appropriate to an understanding of the concept and values inherent in a ‘learning community’. Attention is brought to the operationalisation of ‘learning community’ into a particular interdisciplinary research approach which has not prominently appeared in the literature. This study, therefore, is the only major interdisciplinary research to be conducted of the perceptions of practitioners who are employees of university academic departments and professional business departments; it has linked education and business, two different application contexts, as its major foci.

- it is also significant in that it contributes to methodological improvement through developing ways to operationalise research questions relating to learning communities in questionnaire and semi-structured interview schedule format. This is not just a simple descriptive study, however, as research questions were operationalised from the literature in the shape of six criteria that ‘define’ how a learning community is currently understood. The study examines the common perceptions of the six constituent elements which are considered essential in contributing to various learning communities as portrayed in the literature, and operationalises these constructs as criteria to the contemporary work place environments to extend understanding of what concept of ‘learning community’ is being practised. More specifically, the criteria have been utilised in researcher developed questionnaires and face-to-face interview items to ‘test’ how the cross-cultural groups of practitioners see their work places in the context of how a learning community has been defined in the literature, contributing to the existing research methodologies. An integrative multi-phase, multi-site, multi-person and multi-method approach to data collection and data analysis also empowers the research methodologies allowing for individual practitioners’ voices to be heard in reporting personal experiences and for high levels of trustworthiness to be generated and, therefore, validity to be achieved. This study provided an illustrative methodology for future examinations of similar or related projects.

Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis is organised around five chapters: Introduction (Chapter 1); Review of the Literature (Chapter 2); Methodology (Chapter 3); Data Analysis and Results (Chapter 4); Discussion and Conclusion (Chapter 5).

Chapter Two – Review of the Literature:

This Introduction chapter is followed by Chapter 2 in which literature pertaining to the subject of learning community and related domains of knowledge are historically and contemporarily reviewed, laying the ground-work for the research questions and sub-questions to be conceptualised and addressed. Related but different concepts are untangled to assist in understanding the definition of ‘learning community’, as used in this thesis. The review of the literature associated with various meanings, ideas and views on learning community identified gaps in the knowledge and the theoretical framework of the subject that remain unexplored by previous researchers, and indicates where this research project is designed to address from a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective. The literature surrounding learning communities of theories and practices explore the related attributes of effective learning communities which permeate the literature including the following:

- i) shared mission, vision, values and goals;
- ii) commitment to continuous improvement;
- iii) collaborative culture and collective enquiry;
- iv) supportive and shared leadership;
- v) freedom of group membership; and
- vi) proximity and mutual engagement.

Each of these is the result of a comprehensive synthesis related literature review on learning communities and is operationalised as a *sine qua non* criterion of a successful learning community forming the basis of this thesis.

Chapter Three – Methodology:

This chapter outlines the broad research approach and describes the methodology of the thesis, detailing the research design in which this project is cross-cultural and interdisciplinary. This chapter also considers the contexts of the research

questions and describes a study situated in an interpretivist or constructivist theoretical perspective of the paradigm. The profiles of samples in two university academic departments and two business organisations in Australia and China are also introduced in this chapter. Since this study involves four organisations in two countries, this chapter delineates the iterative multiple methods that are designed to capture multiple sources in the data collection and the implications of this in terms of the data analysis processes. The ethical considerations and procedures used together with a discussion of a set of evaluation criteria in judging the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study also are contained within this chapter.

Chapter Four – Data Analysis and Results:

This chapter begins the close analysis of the results obtained from the engaged four cohorts within a two-by-two comparison. A combination of both quantitative and qualitative data from the survey-questionnaires is reported, and the results are supplemented by the information collected through the face-to-face interviews and related data gathered through documentary materials. In the data analysis on which this chapter is based, differences are reported by participants in understanding how their work places can be perceived as learning communities.

Chapter Five – Discussion and Conclusion:

This chapter summaries the major findings of the study, focussing on the discussion in the context of related literature and research findings reviewed in Chapter 2. The discussion on the findings are organised under headings, each presenting one of the contributing research questions. This chapter also concludes with a summary of the research findings. Insights and implications, in which some of the resonances inherent within this research project are contemplated, are pinpointed. Last but not the least, the thesis ends with a coda drawing attention to the further research where suggestions are offered based on the conclusions drawn from this study to deliver future improvements.

Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter served as an orientation and a general introduction to the present study. A brief overview of theories and concepts related to ‘learning’ and ‘community’ that constitute the key term ‘learning community’ was defined, followed by a brief introduction of the widespread acceptance of learning community in both contemporary educational and professional practice. This chapter also provided an overview of the research topic by outlining the purpose and scope of the study, addressing the research methodology, aim and rationale, and presented the research questions, laying the foundations of this thesis. The significance of this study was justified by delineating the research in the context of extant literature and the change in contemporary practice, one of which points to a challenge to take learning community research into a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary consideration. So far, this challenge has not been met as previous research lacked the methods to capture the comparison between them. This chapter concluded by presenting the structure and outline of this thesis.

The following chapter contains an extensive review of the literature concerning learning community and pertinent theoretical concepts, along with related domain knowledge upon which the study was based. The review begins to discern a developmental trajectory and constituent construction of learning community. It then narrows its focus to international lenses of education and business studies of learning community, in particular that are most relevant to this thesis. It then explores a conceptual framework, synthesising six catalysts as criteria to promote and sustain a learning community that have enabled the analysis of learning community in a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary context.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

A critical review of the literature on the subject of learning community and related domains of knowledge was conducted in order to provide a theoretical foundation for the research and to address the research question and sub-questions posed in Chapter 1. As this study is cross-cultural and interdisciplinary in nature, the literature for this chapter has been drawn from diverse sources, contexts, cultures and disciplines because of their relevance to different aspects of this study, and while it is not limited to theoretical development and empirical research recent works are emphasised.

Background and Context

As institutions as varied as commercial, educational and philanthropical have grappled with questions of maximising their productivity, many have embraced approaches such as the learning community (Atak & Erturgut, 2010; Zhao & Kuh, 2004), Learning Organisation (Argyris, 2002b; Atak & Erturgut, 2010; Kline & Saunders, 1998; Senge, 2006; Wenger, 1998), or implemented the concept of the Professional Learning Community (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; DuFour et al., 2010; Hord, 2004; J. L. Jones, Jones, Pickus, & Ludwig, 2010; Stoll, 2007; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006) or the Community of Practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; J. Mitchell, McKenna, & Young, 2008; Nagy & Burch, 2009; Viskovic, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger et al., 2009). Developing a learning community appears to hold considerable promise as a means of creating and sharing knowledge and as a paradigm shift that is necessary, or even essential, for organisational success.

While contemplating the future, however, a number of enduring issues remain contentious but unresolved pertaining to what significance does a learning community really play in practice. How are learning communities defined, developed, shaped, organised, functioned, adopted, and/or designed, by

institutions and organisations as different as hi-tech companies, and academic institutions, and perceived by practitioners in varied contexts? The answers to these questions are not as clear cut as they could be, but suggest a need to deconstruct or ‘unpack’ the use of the term ‘learning community’ in the literature to examine their constructions and usage. The purpose of this chapter is not only to review the various ‘decoded’ meanings of learning communities, but also to 1) interpret or encode the range of meanings of learning communities, 2) attempt to achieve a synthesis whereby meanings, ideas and views on – and of – learning community are culturally and interdisciplinary universal, though operationalised variously, and 3) provide a theoretical foundation to identify gaps in knowledge that this research project is designed to address, and add some value to the knowledge base of the learning community research field.

Preliminary Investigation into the Field

Extent of the review

Research into ‘learning community’ emerged with the rise to prominence of qualitative research methods in the latter part of the twentieth century while the theoretical arguments relating to the learning community concept can be traced from earlier in the twentieth century. Much of the impetus for the learning community research sprang from educational theory and practice (see, for example, Lenning & Ebbers, 1999; Pea, 1993; Salomon, 1993). However, a search of the literature on learning community also reveals a broad range of research available in the business and organisational worlds (see, for example, Senge, 1990, on Learning Organisation). In the wake of either the sweeping pedagogical shift from passive learning to active learning, or organisational shift from individual based learning to the organisational learning, the concept of the learning community has received extensively favourable attention from researchers; however, for the most part the relevant research is published in English and in the West.

The chronological extent of the literature reviewed for this study therefore extends to the current work of researchers by keeping up-to-date with the latest literature related to learning community. The geographical extent is observed from culturally heterogeneous studies in different countries. In addition, this review of the literature is related to education, workplaces, and business organisational settings. The broad nature of the communities examined in the present study add new insights into the learning community ‘theory’ and help to make sense of practices whereby practitioners learn and think about being a member of the particular community.

Literature review process

A preliminary but extensive search and review of the theoretical and empirical literature was conducted by reference to the topic of interest accessed from books, journals, and other published resources collected by several university libraries and the National Library of Australia. In addition, electronic database services and aggregators (particularly Australian Education Index (A+Education), Proquest, Sociological Abstracts, Academic Search Premier, Informaworld and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) as well as others available through EBSCOHost Education) also were scanned to provide the bibliographic resource information, as well as specifically locating the documents in this research field. This process of literature exploring, as a way to position the areas of expertise and penetrate the quality of the scholarly work of the most cited and respected in the field, allowed the researcher to perceive and specify the gaps in the bodies of knowledge.

Theoretical Underpinning and Emergent Definitions

A number of social science theories are apparent in relation to the way in which researchers from 1950 to the present represent different ideologies of learning in various disciplinary fields. Two themes dominate much of contemporary

advocacy and practice, namely the Learning Organisation and its later transformation – the Learning Community.

However, conceptions of a learning community are varied with different meanings ascribed in different cultures. Investigating the cross-cultural comparison of the perceptions of a learning community requires clarification of a number of key concepts that may contribute towards the understanding of the developmental trajectory as well as constituent values pertinent to the architecture of a Learning Community. Each of these key concepts consists of a variety of attributes that differentiates them, but their boundaries are blurred and partly overlap.

Interrelated topics of study are reviewed as they relate to the theoretical underpinning and emergent definitions of this study, focusing on learning community and Learning Organisation. Research, which has made visible the learning communities valued in both educational and business contexts in relation to organisational learning, also are reviewed.

Learning Organisation (LO)

The study of organisational learning, from which the many forms of Learning Organisation theory emerge, became popularised in the literature with the work of Garratt (1987), Pedler, Boydell, and Burgoyne (1988), and Senge (1990, 1994, 2006). Learning Organisation is regarded, not as a product of theories of organisational learning, rather, it promotes behaviours that enable an organisation to outcompete others in its field. Learning Organisation is “not a stringent prescribed model but instead a set of organisational behaviours that exemplify a commitment to learning and improvement” (Collie & Taylor, 2004, p. 142).

There are varied definitions of organisational learning (Bontis, Crossan, & Hulland, 2002). Organisational learning is treated by theorists of organisational business as a behaviour responsible for determining the level of resolution that occurs within the spectrum of expected outcomes and actual results (Argyris &

Schon, 1978), and is viewed as “high-level learning” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985), “generative learning” (Senge, 1990, 2006), double-loop learning (Argyris, 2002a; Argyris & Schon, 1978), organisational-led collective learning (Heraty, 2004; Nevis, DiBella, & Gould, 1995), strategic learning (Edmondson, 2002), or the capacity to maintain or improve performance (Nevis et al., 1995).

Recently, there has been a growing recognition that the social and cultural context in which organisations apply organisational learning influences the meaning of the term Learning Organisation. This has led to heightened research interest from a number of perspectives. Studies over the past years have explored Learning Organisation development in relation to the demands of increasingly specialised organisational management areas (Garvin, 1993; Garvin & Levesque, 2006; Hannah & Lester, 2009; Jantunen, 2005; Lien, Hung, & McLean, 2007; Senge, 2006; C. Yang, Wang, & Niu, 2007; Zagorsek, Dimovski, & Skerlavaj, 2009; H. Zhu, Hitt, & Tihanyi, 2007), the nature of knowledge management and creation (Marquardt, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Takeuchi & Nonaka, 2004; Watkins & Marsick, 1993; Weldy, 2009), and the practical measurement of organisational performance (Song, Joo, & Chermack, 2009; B. Yang, 2005; B. Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004).

The popularity of the research interest has resulted in a conceptual fragmentation of the term Learning Organisation, and the literature reveals that little definitional consensus exists and thus its essence has been described as difficult to actualise (Garvin, 1993). The early meaning of the concept of Learning Organisation was influenced by Argyris and Schon (1978) whose technical account of organisational learning was described as an individuals’ learning process of the detection and correction of errors within organisations (Argyris, 2002a). He contended that a Learning Organisation is made up of inputs, throughputs, and outputs which are all connected by feedback loops. Senge (1990), however, made the idea of a Learning Organisation more explicit in terms of organisational ‘systems thinking’ in a broader sense, rather than solely on individual

troubleshooting behaviours related to organisational goals (Argyris & Schon, 1978). Learning Organisation was defined by Senge (2006) as one in which people “continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together” (p. 3). Garvin along with others (Garvin, 1993; Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008), however, argued that the conceptualisation of Learning Organisation formulated by Senge (1990) is far too abstract, resulting in uncertainty regarding what a learning organisation is and how to transform an organisation into a Learning Organisation. They defined a Learning Organisation as one that is “skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights” (Garvin, 1993, p. 80), and suggested practical activities whereby Learning Organisation may be manifested, managed and measured.

Criteria developed by Learning Organisation theorists are evident in the research literature of educational settings (Dill, 1999; Franklin, Hodgkinson, & Stewart, 1998; N. Kumar & Idris, 2006; Watkins, 2005; White & Weathersby, 2005), business organisations (Garvin et al., 2008; Garvin & Levesque, 2006; Marquardt, 2011; Senge, 2006; Weldy, 2009) or other workplace contexts. Researchers from these disciplines challenge the descriptions of attributes of successful learning organisations, developing different conceptual frameworks (Bui & Baruch, 2010; Garvin, 1993; Kezar, 2006; Patterson, 1999), such as organisational learning capability (DiBella, Nevis, & Gould, 1996; Jerez-Gomez, Cespedes-Lorente, & Valle-Cabrera, 2005), models (Birnbaum, 2000; Davis & Daley, 2008; Hannah & Lester, 2009), facilitating factors (Chiva, 2004; Chiva & Alegre, 2009), dimensions (Dymock & McCarthy, 2006; N. Kumar & Idris, 2006; Marsick & Watkins, 2003), ‘implications’ (Watkins, 2005), ‘building blocks’ (Garvin, 1993; Garvin et al., 2008), subsystems (Marquardt, 2011), core disciplines (Senge, 1990, 2006), as being necessary for important transitions in the different workplace contexts.

While a universally acknowledged definition of Learning Organisation has eluded the scholarly community, common to all researchers' use of 'Learning Organisation' is the emphasis on the improvement and effectiveness of organisational performance. It may be argued that interest in Learning Organisations is largely limited to addressing how organisational learning behaviours in the context of a Learning Organisation influence organisational performance.

However, Chiva and Alegre (2009) contended that although many researchers had posited that a positive impact of being a Learning Organisation on organisational performance existed, remarkably "no research has provided empirical evidence of its positive links with employee attitudes" (p. 324). In addition, while a plethora of researchers contribute to the need to make visible the constructs needed for a successful Learning Organisation, there has as yet been little research which described the employees' attitudes towards the multidimensional constructs developed by those researchers, nor the ways in which the attributes of Learning Organisation are perceived within their workplace settings. Such a gap in the literature is found also in the field of Learning Community.

Learning Community

The possibility of academic institutions becoming learning organisations has been the subject of a great deal of research interest over the past twenty years. As previously stated, the concept of Learning Organisation has already been employed to apply to educational institutions for university departments' learning (Dill, 1999), application of a business model to academic programs (Gentle, 2001), survival of the private educational institution (N. Kumar & Idris, 2006), or a university's ability to adopt reform policies (Harman, 2005). While a strand of this literature has supported the transfer of the idea of Learning Organisation from corporate to academic settings, researchers from a broad range of perspectives have challenged these positive perceptions, particularly in relation to the different criteria that universities had to demonstrate to be described as a Learning

Organisation. This was because universities were “less successful in applying that (new) knowledge to their own activities” (Garvin, 1993, p. 80), different motivation for higher education employees who were “intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated by rewards” (Kezar, 2006, p. 811), or different purposes of academic institutions and business organisations to engage with social accountability (Birnbaum, 2000). Despite the inclusion of educational settings within the definition of Learning Organisation, studies of academic institutions suggest that a learning community is most likely to occur within education contexts.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the prototype of a formal Learning Community can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Dewey’s (1938) experimental school or Meiklejohn’s experimental college that served as a basis for educational reforms. When learning is applied to community as in the term learning community, thought has been divided into different literatures, but two major genres of learning community surfaced:

- Professional Learning Community (PLC) (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; DuFour et al., 2010; Huffman, 2003; J. L. Jones et al., 2010; Lieberman, 2007; Moston, 2008; Reichstetter, 2006; Stoll, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006)
- Community of Practice (CoP) (Barton & Tusting, 2006; Klein, Riordan, Schwartz, & Sotirhos, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; J. Mitchell et al., 2008; Schwier & Daniel, 2008; J. K. Shin & Bickel, 2008; Viskovic, 2006; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011; Wenger et al., 2009)

In order to better understand the nature of learning community, it is necessary to review literature which has sought to operationalise concepts of PLC and CoP, and to situate them within broader theories of contemporary learning community discussion.

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Definitions of PLC which go beyond concepts regarding Learning Organisation are shared by many educators within broad academic fields (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2010; Huffman, 2003; J. L. Jones et al., 2010; Lieberman, 2007; Moston, 2008; Reichstetter, 2006; Stoll, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006). Perspectives from these educators are particularly valuable in providing insight into the ways in which the concept of PLC is invoked, and what emerging common attributes might be across diverse educational settings.

Hord (1997) describes a PLC as one “in which teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning” (p. 6). Unlike the goal orientated business Learning Organisation “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire” (Senge, 2006, p. 3), PLC tends to be grassroots, non-specialised, and non-formally organised teacher and administrators’ learning groups oriented more towards building school-level capacity and improving students’ performance rather than in more formally defined business organisational performance where the goal is seen in higher profits.

Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas and Wallace (2005) suggested PLC was “the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning” (p. 145). Bolam et al.’s (2005) definition is particularly pertinent to a discussion of all stakeholders motivated by a strong shared vision on student learning. While PLC is viewed as extending community membership beyond the teachers and administrators to all school professional staff, the focus on shared vision also is extended.

Researchers recognised that inclusive membership, mutual support, networks and partnerships (Stoll et al., 2006), supportive leadership, collaboration toward continued improvement (Reichstetter, 2006), collective inquiry, results orientation

(DuFour et al., 2010), shared mission, vision, values and goals (J. L. Jones et al., 2010) were essential for PLC growth and effectiveness. These attributes of PLC are reflected and evidenced in different definitions; for example, Stoll et al., (2006) defined PLC as “a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented, growth promoting way, and operating as a collective enterprise” (p. 223). Reichstetter (2006) describes PLC as “made up of team members who regularly collaborate toward continued improvement in meeting learner needs through a shared curricular-focused vision” (p. 1). DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010) defined PLC as “an on-going process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 11). These definitions offer a range of ways to describe a PLC based on Hord’s original initial definition. Table 2.1 provides a brief summary of key characteristics from studies presented in chronological order.

Table 2.1

Overview of Research on PLC

Author	Date	Definition	Key Characteristics
Hord	1997	PLC as an learning organisation “in which teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning” (p. 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ supportive and shared leadership ▪ shared values and vision ▪ collective learning and application of learning ▪ supportive conditions ▪ shared practice
Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas & Wallace	2005	“An inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other to inquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches to enhance student learning” (p. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ inclusive group of people ▪ shared learning vision ▪ work with each other ▪ inquiry practice

Table 2.1

Overview of Research on PLC (Continued)

Author	Date	Definition	Key Characteristics
Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas	2006	“A group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning oriented, growth promoting way, operating as a collective enterprise” (p. 223)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ mutual trust, respect and support among staff members ▪ inclusive membership ▪ openness, networks and partnerships
Reichstetter	2006	A PLC is believed to be largely “made up of team members who regularly collaborate toward continued improvement in meeting learner needs through a shared curricular-focused vision” (p. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ supportive leadership and structural conditions, ▪ collective challenging, questioning, and reflecting on team-designed lessons and instructional practices/experiences, and ▪ team decisions on essential learning outcomes and intervention/enrichment activities based on results of common formative student assessments
DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many	2010	“An on-going process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ focus on learning, collaborative culture, collective inquiry, action orientation ▪ a commitment to continuous improvement ▪ results orientation
Jones, Jones, Pickus, & Ludwig	2010	“The concept of ‘professional learning community’ has four defining characteristics. These essential attributes are:” (p. 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ supportive and collaborative conditions ▪ commitment to continuous improvement ▪ results orientation ▪ shared mission, vision, values and goals

Much of the literature of PLCs is focused on school settings and other educational settings are poorly represented. There are significant gaps in the PLC literature with respect to the applicability to other academic institutions, in particular to higher education institutions. The perspectives offered by PLC researchers showed them interested in how schools operate as learning communities (see, for example, Roberts, Pruitt, & Sullivan, 2009) and this contributed to understanding the other educational practices of a learning community and, in turn, to recognising the need for consideration of learning communities in higher education. As concerns have been raised about the impact of the concept Learning Community in higher education (Kitchen, Ciuffetelli Parker, & Gallagher, 2008; Minkler, 2002), the focus of research into the ways in which higher educational institutions operate as learning communities has been extended. Current research draws attention to ways that, for example, may ensure university students from different disciplines develop Student Learning Communities (SLCs) (Zhao & Kuh, 2004), or those junior faculty, midcareer and senior faculty, department chairs, deans, and other graduate students preparing to be future faculty function as Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) (M. D. Cox, 2004). Of increasing interest are subjects related to how FLC is defined and shaped by cross-disciplinary faculty and staff groups. According to M. D. Cox (2004), a FLC is defined as:

A cross-disciplinary faculty and staff group of six to fifteen members (eight to twelve members is the recommended size) who engage in an active, collaborative, yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning, development, the scholarship of teaching, and community building (p. 8).

There are different types of FLC: Cohort based, topic based, university affiliated (UFLC) or on the other end of the spectrum and independent faculty learning community (IFLC). The cohort based FLC focus on the needs of a specific group of people, for example program directors or deans. The topic-based FLC focuses

on teaching and learning needs, issues or opportunities. UFLC may have highly structured curricula; others give faculty participants relative autonomy in selecting topics of discussion. IFLU is unstructured and without an institutional affiliation, thus making them difficult to identify and research.

M. D. Cox (2004) also suggested the structure of a FLC is developed by a time period of at least six months; has voluntary membership; meet at a designated time and in an environment conducive to learning; develop empathy among members; operate by consensus, not majority; develop their own culture, openness, and trust; engage complex problems; energize and empower participants; have the potential of transforming institutions into learning organisations; and are holistic in approach. These are supported also as key elements to develop FLCs by other universities (see, for example, T. R. Smith et al., 2008), which aimed to stimulate or promote “a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done” (McGill & Beaty, 1992, p. 11).

However, a review of the PLC in schools settings and its transformation to universities settings as FLC indicates that both the burgeoning body of Learning Community literature are strongly rooted in the literature of Learning Organisation. On the one hand, the concept of PLC is defined as represented in the work of Senge’s description, and the process of PLC development work as a Learning Organisation (Hord, 1997, 2004). On the other hand, creating a FLC is one approach that engages community in the cause of student and faculty learning and of transforming our institutions of higher education into Learning Organisations (M. D. Cox, 2001). There has been a considerable Learning Community literature developed concerned with PLC or FLC, but examination of Learning Organisation and two learning community genres across these very different contexts, such as in business organisations, in schools or in higher educational settings, has been missing. This review provides a solid foundation to broaden the conceptualisation of both Learning Organisation and Learning

Community, which were well developed in the literature, but rarely strongly and connectively studied empirically.

Community of Practice (CoP)

In 1991, CoP was defined as “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping Communities of Practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). The concept of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (LPP) was proposed to describe a movement in which new participants in a CoP learned, observed, situated and actively engaged with experienced veterans, and eventually themselves gain mastery of skills and knowledge. LPP refers to “the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 55). The authors emphasised that the active engagement around a practice in the same discipline was developed by community members moving from their role of ‘peripheral’ to ‘full participation’. This transfer of an existing skills set or the reproduction of existing knowledge base reflected the journey of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), where novices gradually acquired knowledge and apply skills to take over their responsibility until they can, metaphorically, stand on their own feet (Cole, 1985). In this sense, CoP is posited as a learning process in which memberships, over time, develop a purposeful identity within the practice. This helps provide a cognitive and situated learning view of the CoP in its early stage.

Wenger (1998) subsequently refined the concept of the CoP by highlighting ‘situated learning’, pointing to the significance of community members’ interactions within CoPs. Wenger suggested a succinct structure in CoP; whereby three interrelated qualities are identified, namely joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire (pp. 72-73). These depict CoP as the joint knowledge sharing process by mutually engaged community individuals. This identification lays the foundation for the later development in the field of CoP.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) continued this approach with a comprehensive account of a clear-cut model of CoP based upon examples of a range of elite companies and organisations, including the World Bank, Shell Oil, and McKinsey & Company. Unlike Wenger's earlier ideas when he worked with Lave (whose philosophy of CoP is more closely aligned with issues of learning and education), Wenger et al., (2002) now directed their thinking into the fields of business and management. The authors moved away from utilising the three early interrelated qualities to define a CoP, and consequently refined and sharply differentiated the notion of CoP from other similar notions of learning communities. They concluded that CoP comprised three constituent elements: a domain of knowledge; a community of people, and a shared practice. Each is a key driver shaping a well-rounded CoP for organisational success. Wenger et al., (2002) claimed that "When they function well together, these three elements make a community of practice an ideal knowledge structure – a social structure that can assume responsibility for developing and sharing knowledge" (p. 29). The coined concept of CoP in this book is perhaps this literature's most renowned and heuristically-valuable notion, characterising the three fundamental elements as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). In this context, a closer examination at what CoP looks like and how it might operate effectively in different settings, suggests a significant shift from the earlier works cited in much of the critical literature (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). CoP is convincingly presented as a managerial tool that can be used by practitioners to improve a particular performance and outcome in their organisations. That is, we can see the concept evolving from a tentative concept to a theory and finally materialising from theory to actual practice.

Contextualised into a Cross-cultural and Interdisciplinary Perspective

The literature referred to in the above sections shows that meanings of Learning Community and related theories are defined variously by researchers according to their underlying foci, but most were developed in the U.S. by researchers such as John Seely Brown, Peter Michael Senge, and Richard McDermott. Researchers and practitioners must be aware that different cultures may use different combined or interpreted words, though expressed similarly. For example, in Chinese, ‘Community of Practice’ can be labelled as a polysem that has been interpreted in many ways, such as ‘实践社区’; ‘实践社团’; ‘实务社群’; ‘实践共同体’. This study seeks to consolidate much of the conceptual work of previous research into a cross-cultural comparison of learning communities between Australia and China in order to give more prominence to a more nuanced view of different organisational learning contexts where their national cultures may be deeply rooted in both understanding and developing learning communities in their own settings.

Cross-cultural comparison research and implications with an interdisciplinary emphasis in institutions have been largely under-documented, and would be of particular significance, because organisational cultures are derived from the national culture as ‘parent culture’ (Schein, 2010) that, in turn, has an impact on organisational culture (G. H. Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Williams, Dobson, & Walters, 1993), or as a major component of the broader ‘contextual imperative’ that constrains organisational culture (Falk, Elver, & Hajjar, 2008).

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) reviewed many definitions of culture from the social sciences literature and on this basis, argued that:

Culture is an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning, and includes the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices

characterizing an institution, organisation or group (p. 357).

Extending this oft-cited definition to the realm of the learning community research implies that culture, as conceptualised as “a system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings” (Pettigrew, 1979, p. 574); “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89), and “a conceptual structure or system of ideas” (Geertz, 1984, p. 8), or “the collective programming of the mind” (G. H. Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 6), that is, shared by a large group of people who hold common characteristic values, beliefs, norms and ways of understanding, interpreting and acting on community occurrences within and outside the community are embedded in a country’s culture.

A corpus of cross-cultural studies has developed culture frameworks based on core value dimensions that could be generalised to identify national cultures and to cluster national cultures in groups (G. H. Hofstede, 1980, 1993, 2001; G. H. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; G. J. Hofstede, Hofstede, & Pedersen, 2002; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 2004, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2001; Triandis, 1995; Trompenaars, 2010). Hofstede et al., (1990) focused on cultural differences between national cultures and cultures within organisations. On the other hand, Sagiv and Schwartz (2007) focused on the similarities between national cultures and organisational cultures and contended that organisational cultures are dominated by societal pressure. Schwartz (2011) built on a number of other theories such as G. H. Hofstede’s cultural value dimensions and argued that culture has implicit and explicit values, which can only be measured through its manifestations. Those researchers who adopt a cross-cultural stance (see, for example, Steers, Nardon, & Sanchez-Runde, 2009; Y. Yang, Nguyen, & Jang, 2011) are usually more concerned with investigating how one culture group differs from another. The strengths of cross-cultural comparative research have led to this approach as being the most common in the literature. Cross-cultural research brings the strengths of comparing differing cultural variables to expand the theories which are based only

on a limited set of observations. It is employed for strengthening and broadening the scope of contextual knowledge by describing and analysing relations between social-cultural contexts and human behaviours, which is not possible for a study that is carried out solely within a single culture; therefore, the findings promote understanding and knowledge beyond that which can be obtained in a single culture research study.

However, a comparison of Australia and China appears to be difficult when using the above cross-cultural framework. Most culture value measurement instruments such as G. H. Hofstede's survey were western-based and his results were based on research conducted only in one company across the company's many worldwide offices. The culture of Australians, for example in G. H. Hofstede's (1980) findings, was clearly characterised as 'individualistic', with 'low power distance', 'low uncertainty avoidance', 'largely masculine' and 'short-term in orientation'. G. H. Hofstede (1980) was silent when it comes to the People's Republic of China; Chinese culture was not included in G. H. Hofstede's original research of the 1970s (Chung, 2008). Albeit, G. H. Hofstede noticed the findings of the Chinese Value Survey (CVS) (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987) and later labelled the fifth dimension: time orientation (long-term versus short-term) – also termed 'Confucian dynamism' (G. H. Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Tayeb, 2003) to explain the rapid economic success in Chinese culture and attempt to complete the value system. It is insufficient to capture the prominent features of Chinese culture for as Fang (Fang, 2003, 2010) argued the underlying notion of Chinese culture requires a new perspective. Chinese culture has been given more attention by a number of researchers (see, for example, Bond, 1991; Buckley, Clegg, & Tan, 2006; Fernandez, 2004; Leung & Chan, 2003; W. Li, Ardichvili, Maurer, Wentling, & Stuedemann, 2007; Pheng & Yuquan, 2002; C. J. Zhu, Cooper, De Cieri, & Dowling, 2005)

In summary, G. H. Hofstede (1980, 1993, 2001) and other Chinese culture researchers suggest that Chinese culture can be characterised by the terms:

collectivism, large power distance and high uncertainty avoidance, and extremely long-term orientation.

Thus, a simple cross-cultural research study involving Australia and China also suggests some concerns and highlights matters to keep in mind. For example, there is likelihood that within a specific cultural system there may be cultural compatibilities or different “levels of depth” of cultural attributes (Hofstede 1991, p. 8) in which certain manifestations of sub-cultural values are more or less nuanced, though sharing core values. This ‘inequivalence’ of comparison between two phenomena within a specific cultural milieu can be a threat to the validity of cross-cultural research or present a cross-cultural bias. Interdisciplinary research therefore brings the strengths of across-boundary knowledge which can be employed to minimise the bias of cross-cultural measurement. Researchers in different disciplines may study the same particular phenomenon or behaviour which they share (Lele & Norgaard, 2005).

A review of the literature suggests some cross-cultural research has crossed the boundaries between fields, for example, cross-cultural management (Deresky, 2011), cross-cultural collaboration (Nurmi, 2009) and cross-cultural communication (Brew & Cairns, 2004), but considerably less attention has been paid to ‘learning community’ from a cross-cultural perspective. Therefore, for this study, two principal research areas were formulated to address the gap in the literature, namely,

Research Question 1

How do stakeholders perceive their work contexts as a learning community?

- 1) Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions?
- 2) Are there institutional differences in stakeholder perceptions?

Research Question 2

How do stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria fit with criteria operationalised from the literature?

- 1) How do stakeholders perceive each of the developed criteria that define learning community?
- 2) Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions of learning community towards each of the developed criteria?
- 3) To what extent do the operationalised criteria fit stakeholders' perceptions?

In attempting to examine these issues, a learning community theoretical framework along with more broadly encompassing related conceptual consideration are needed. However, the lack of theoretical frameworks for cross-cultural research on the operation of a learning community is limited because of the very few empirical studies in this area.

Integrative Conceptual Framework

The review of the literature revealed that there are numerous conceptual refinements developed around the aforementioned theories. Senge (1990, 2006) framed five "learning disciplines" in building the Learning Organisation, namely, systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. DuFour et al., (2010) described a PLC framework in school settings consisting of three components: a focus on learning, collaborative culture, and results-oriented thinking. Wenger (1998) also identified three factors: joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire. In a later work, Wenger (2002) identified three different factors needed for CoP: a domain of knowledge, a community of people, and a shared practice. It can be seen that the idea of learning community is undoubtedly broad in its theoretical coverage as it is deeply embedded in scholarly and, possibly, ideological discussions. While

notions and implementation of learning community vary considerably, the literature on learning community has moved beyond a proposal or theory orientation towards a more practical approach. A body of recent empirical research (see, for example, Samaras, Freese et al., 2008) extended the original concepts and added more knowledge to the conceptual framework in both historical depth as well as the contemporary breadth of scholarly research.

This review sought to examine the literature of what constituted a learning community by analysing, synthesising, and evaluating relevant learning community theories and the related domains of knowledge and, from there, derived a number of distinct but interrelated imperatives or ‘common’ values that demonstrate how organisations develop as learning communities. Each of these common values is elaborated upon in the following section.

Shared Mission, Vision, Values and Goals: Common Value One

A body of studies addressed the significance of Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals for developing a Learning Community. “Building a shared vision” was embodied as a key component in Senge’s fifth discipline required of a Learning Organisation. A Learning Organisation can only be successful if the organisational vision aligns with that of individuals; “One is hard pressed to think of any organisation that has sustained some measure of greatness in the absence of goals, values, and missions that become deeply shared throughout the organisation” (Senge, 2006, p. 9).

Senge (2006) argued that, if a vision is truly shared within an organisation, individuals tend to excel and learn, not because they are requested or forced to, but because they want to. A shared vision is suggested as the first step, and that it matters deeply to people involved to apply learning in the workplace. A common identity is imparted by a shared vision, which “extends principles and insights from personal mastery into the world of collective aspiration and shared commitment” (Senge, 2006, p. 197).

“A shared vision” defined by Senge as one key discipline in building a learning organisation, was earlier proposed by Hord (1997, 2004) who clearly put ‘shared values and vision’ as core dimensions required for a successful PLC in education. The PLC vision was described as a process of developing and ascertaining a shared vision through which staff are encouraged to be involved to decide “what is important to an individual and to an organisation” (Hord, 2004, p. 8), rather than just “agreeing with a good idea” (1997, p. 19) or “worth the paper they are written on” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 25). The role of a shared vision and sense of mission was evident also in established PLCs (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Stoll et al., 2006; Youngs & King, 2002) and developing a vision statement is one way to achieve the inclusion of values (Huffman, 2003).

However, mission and vision statements per se do not correlate highly with how people act either due to a gap between individual and common ambitions in education (Cowan, 2003), or knowing-doing in business (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). To close that gap, the four ‘pillars’ of: mission, vision, values, and goals upon which a PLC rests, were suggested by DuFour et al., (2010) who proposed a move beyond writing mission statements to, first, articulating the vision, values, and goals and, second, aligning all their practices accordingly: “Expressions of commitment to strong moral purpose only generate cynicism if the commitment is not manifested through behaviour” (p. 255).

Existing research on the topic of CoP (as another model of the learning community) indicates one of the significant constructions of a CoP, that is, what brings members together or where there are shared interests, may be a key factor in the extent to which the community develops a shared mission, vision, values and goals (see, for example, Bonk, Wisner, & Nigrelli, 2004; Preston & Lengel, 2004). A mission exists as CoP members share “a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic”, and a vision achieved through members who “deepen knowledge and expertise”, with a value that clarifies how CoP works by “interacting on an ongoing basis”, and, consequently, improving organisational

competitiveness as a goal (Wenger et al., 2002). Thus, a shared mission, vision, values and goals also seems to fit closely with the definition of CoP. Wenger et al., (2002) also suggested that CoP develop a shared mission, vision, values and goals “among a critical mass of members regarding the direction of the community and how they can become integral mechanisms for running the business” (p. 201) and “create value by connecting the personal development and professional identities of practitioners to the strategy of the organization. Successful ones deliver value to their members as well as to the organization” (p. 17).

Commitment to Continuous Improvement: Common Value Two

In addition, the increasing focus on building and sustaining a learning community either in business or educational contexts suggests that to ensure a shared mission, vision, values, and goals, all stakeholders understand that a commitment to continuous improvement is vital. It can be described as “the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (Fullan, 2005, p. ix).

The ongoing cycles of each organisation’s members focusing on learning is undisputed in tapping this capacity and commitment, and has been the subject of much research in the areas of organisational learning, The Learning Organisation and the learning community.

Argyris and Schon (1978) focused on the reasons why organisational performance can be improved by an ongoing learning process of detection and correction of mistakes. Argyris (1991) suggested that when employees and managers “turn the focus away from their own behavior to that of others [it] brings learning to a grinding halt” (p. 9), the purpose of which provides an incentive for employees to increase their commitment to continuous learning and for implementing strategy. Senge (1990) concurred but also indicated that a Learning Organisation is “a continuous process of experimentation” (p. 348), or a “deep learning cycle”

(Senge, 1994, p. 395) where learning takes place beyond the development of new individual capacities and was rather a “domain of enduring change” within the organisation. It is the cyclical nature of this domain of action where learning is no longer driven by short-term gains, but more by long-term vision and commitment. Learning takes place when individuals wish to increase their chances for advancement and professional growth under changing conditions, as well as the organisation promoting continuous learning to form achievable missions and master uncertain and ambiguous environments (Sessa & London, 2006). Ford, Voyer, and Wilkinson (2000) also stated that, “as utilized knowledge improves performance and those improvements are recognized as the results of organisational learning, they increase the commitment of the organisation and its individuals to organisational learning” (p. 81).

Commitment to continuous improvement, as an essential element of any Learning Organisation, is also well-recognised in the PLC literature. For example, DuFour and his colleagues (2010) stated that “no organisation can continue to improve unless the people within it engage in ongoing learning” (p. 194). Members that must be taken in the “never-ending process of continuous improvement” are committed to, and continuously reaching towards, the organisation’s ideal mission, vision, values and goals (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour, 2009; Hord, 1997; Reichstetter, 2006). Such a commitment creates systematic processes where each member of the organisation is engaged in “a persistent disquiet with the status quo and a constant search for a better way to achieve goals and accomplish the purpose of the organisation” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 13).

Voulalas and Sharpe (2005) place an emphasis on how Australian schools are perceived as learning communities. In their study the concepts of a Learning Community and Learning Organisation were broadly defined and somewhat interchangeable, they concluded that continuous change was perceived by their participants as central in maintaining the effectiveness of their dynamic school learning communities or Learning Organisations.

In terms of CoP, it is perhaps likely that commitment to continuous improvement also is embedded in its definition. The process of learning in the CoP is perceived as a knowledge managing tool operated “on an ongoing basis” for improving organisational development. Wenger et al., (2002) explained that a CoP was constituted by “a unique combination of three fundamental elements” which are domain, community, and practice, where membership implies a commitment to the domain of interest, work as a community, and focus more on the improvement of their practices. “Without commitment to a domain, a community is just a group of friends” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 30). By developing an ongoing practice, community members, as practitioners, build sustained value to serve the organisation’s long-term strategy. CoPs continually define themselves by the needs of the community members, and are constantly changing to promote the community’s development (J. Mitchell et al., 2008). A commitment is nurtured through an ongoing cycle of planning, implementing, data gathering, and reflection as they update vision, review, adjust, and reorganise to enable community members to achieve their shared mission, vision, values and goals aligned with their organisation’s future.

Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry: Common Value Three

Senge’s Learning Organisation theory (1990, 1994, 2006) is based on the innovation in organisational infrastructure that “enable people to develop capabilities like systems thinking and collaborative inquiry within the context of their jobs” (1994, p. 34). The skills of collective reflection and inquiry provide a foundation for dialogue, and learning how to learn together creates a culture of a Learning Organisation which works through a set of ‘disciplines’. Kline and Saunders (1998) also investigated learning organisations but they were more focused on organisational learning through a group of learners to explore the differences and change in the culture. Here, the culture refers to the organisation’s internal culture. However, it is imperative to not only comprehend the culture within which the organisation is operating and explore ways to stimulate

collaborative engagement, but also take a critical stance towards the national culture outside the organisation. Both of these ‘cultures’ need to be examined in the specific institutional context of the organisations in which practitioners collaborate, taking culture both – micro- and macro- – into account. The national or macro-culture may have a larger impact on employees’ behaviours and their perceptions than their organisation’s internal culture (Robbins & Judge, 2010). Through a broad theoretical conceptualisation of culture, G. H. Hofstede and colleagues (2010) emphasised the importance of national culture to the organisational culture, as culture can be conceived broadly as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (p. 6), and the organisational values and beliefs of the culture influence the need to be understood, as individuals are integrated into strong and cohesive groups in such an organisational collaborative culture. Perez-Lopez, Montes-Peon, and Vazquez-Ordas (2004) investigated the organisational culture impacts and asserted that a collaborative culture promoted the organisational learning, which in turn produced positive performance outcomes. However, they cautioned that a collaborative culture needs to be re-examined in light of its role in managing the overall organisational learning infrastructure.

Hord (2004) drew upon these Learning Organisation theories with PLC and also identified “collective learning and application of that learning” (p. 7) as one of the five dimensions into the characteristics of PLCs. She stated PLC encouraged staff at all levels to be engaged in a collective learning process that seeks new knowledge among staff and explores solutions as the application of that learning. As also seen by Huffman and Hipp (2003), this process of learning and application includes the step of developing a collaborative culture that values sharing information. The development of a PLC is, therefore, based on the “strategy for shaping culture to bring teachers together on a regular basis to engage in reflective discussions” and “to evaluate new concepts and ideas that bear upon those practices” (DuFour, 2009, p. 94). More recently, DuFour et al.,

(2010) further argued that the process of collaboration in PLC is targeted to impact positively on educator practice in ways that produce better results for all. DuFour and his colleagues also documented a relationship between the organisational shared mission, vision, values and goals (Common Value One, described above) and commitment to continuous improvement (Common Value Three). The organisational goal is not merely to make repeated work of what has been done regardless of its effectiveness, “but to create a culture of continuous improvement, to discover ways to become better at achieving our purpose, forever” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 140). The only way to achieve this is to embed a collaborative culture of continuous improvement in the process of PLC development. Andrews and Lewis (2007) supported the finding that the power of the PLC resulted in an organisation-wide engagement in processes that lead to ongoing inquiry into different dimensions of pedagogy. PLCs are organised by surrounding people with others who are involved in collective inquiry and new ways of thinking (Lieberman, 2007).

Similarly, central to CoP are the community members who are bonded by a common problem or a shared domain of interest, engaging in collaborative activities as they “interact, and learn together” (Wenger et al., 2002). Interaction among participants moves through discussion to cooperation and collaboration as the CoP takes form (Schwier & Daniel, 2008). In addition, a CoP is not a group, team or network of people, who simply learn and work collaboratively, but rather it is a foundation for collective inquiry and sharing personal practice. The notion of CoP is constituted in the process of negotiation of meaning with the purpose of creating new knowledge (Wenger, 1998) which encourages deep thought leading to collective inquiry on solutions. An effective CoP offers a place to “ask hard questions” and share resolved issues allowing them to “decide what matters” (Wenger et al., 2002) and, therefore, new understandings can be constructed (Hibbert, 2008), the capture of new ideas can be stimulated (Schwier & Daniel, 2008), and then new knowledge can be created through engaging social interactivity (J. K. Shin & Bickel, 2008). The conceptual basis for this, as

described by Kimble, Hildreth and Bourdon (2008), can be traced back to Vygotsky (1978) who argued that knowledge was constructed through collaboration and interaction.

Supportive and Shared Leadership: Common Value Four

Many studies have demonstrated that beyond the conventional premise that leadership is the primary domain of an individual or minority group who solely shoulder the whole responsibility for making organisational decisions, the boundaries of authority and power are now exceeded and leadership is perceived to be supportive and shared, the role of which is treated as a collective undertaking.

In the literature on developing a Learning Organisation (see, for example, Garvin et al., 2008; Senge, 2006) it is suggested that leadership should be supportive, facilitative and transformational, and managerial behaviours need to be more shared and distributed than centralised or directive. Leadership of a Learning Organisation initiates a process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to learn and accomplish the shared mission, vision, values and goals of organisations (David, 2006). Considerable earlier research on leadership assumes a division of learning and work (see, for example, Mintzberg, 1975), whereas a Learning Organisation focuses on constant and continuous learning in the workplace which put leadership as a facilitator (Sarin & McDermott, 2003), a designer, steward, and teacher (Senge, 2006), and as an activity which is collaborative (Schlechty, 2009), shared (Bradford & Cohen, 1998; Wilhelmson, 2006), dispersed (Bryman, 2006; Gordon, 2010; Gronn, 2009), and have distributed function (Grint, 2005; Schein, 2010; Senge, 1990; Yukl, 2010). However, leaders have difficulties in transforming their organisations into learning organisations despite all its attraction (Atak & Erturgut, 2010). Senge (1990) contended that implementation of the set of ‘disciplines’ he proposed are necessary for constituting a learning organisation they may not be adequate for success if leaders do not know how to deal with questions and problems on a reflective, inclusive and supportive basis.

These roles of leaders were identified also as being vital in sustaining PLCs in educational institutions. The PLC literature on leadership is considerable and much of the view of leadership is descriptive and not only drawn from investigations into the positions of administrators, but extended to include staff members (see, for example, DuFour et al., 2010; Enthoven & de Bruijn, 2010; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Administrators are committed to sharing decision making with staff and providing opportunities for them to serve as leaders (Eaker, DuFour, & Burnette, 2009; Enthoven & de Bruijn, 2010). According to Hord and Sommers (2008), PLC can be developed from cases in which power, authority, and decision making are shared, distributed and encouraged between administrators and staff. Leadership, thus, is viewed as shared and distributed among formal and informal leaders (Phillips, 2003; Reichstetter, 2006). DuFour et al., (2010) are concerned also that the current emphasis on “shared decision making, dispersed leadership, staff empowerment, collaboration, and collegiality has tended to obscure another harsh reality about substantive change” (p. 253). They concluded that change demands the sustained attention and effort of leaders. Nevertheless, a lack of attention and interest by leadership in developing a collaborative culture was often apparent in the non-development of a PLC (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007).

Likewise, CoP prompts a rethink of social learning theory as well as organisational management and how a business manages knowledge. The theory treats learning as being beyond the individual to socially situated cognition where active participation and shared decision making are encouraged, as opposed to charismatic, authoritarian and bureaucratic leadership (Weber & Kalberg, 2009) that is often grounded in traditional organisations. “Hierarchical management patterns may not support the collegiality, reciprocity and negotiating that are part of the social learning systems that Wenger envisages” (Viskovic, 2006, p. 335), but more importantly, “highly bureaucratic structures and procedures are likely to backfire with communities” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 159). CoP members hold a number of formal or informal roles within the community and authoritarian and

hierarchical leadership are superseded by self-reliant (Little, 2008) and self-managed members (Wenger et al., 2002).

Freedom of Group Membership: Common Value Five

As portrayed in the literature, positive leadership can be considered as supportive (Hord, 2008) or shared (Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006), and these leadership behaviours may be transformational (Ford et al., 2000), and invoke distributed decision making (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009; Schein, 2010; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). In this context, each individual can be equally empowered by giving a fair amount of freedom to echo authority from the top and further provide the ‘bottom up’ impetus for effective achievement. It is the freedom that Senge (1990) perceived, not ‘freedom from’ but ‘freedom to’ – create the results members truly desire. “It is the freedom that people who pursue personal mastery seek. It is the heart of the learning organisation, because the impulse to generative learning is the desire to create something new, something that has value and meaning to people” (Senge, 1990, p. 261).

Freedom is also essential to education. Central to freedom in education is the notion of academic freedom that students and teachers, administrators and other staff members equipped with a free and open academic atmosphere to pursue truth and knowledge freely and equally, exchange ideas without any fears and restrictions by academic or outside authorities. There was a wide range of understanding as to what academic freedom actually means in the literature. Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1996) defined it as the freedom of members of the academic community in the pursuit, development, and transmission of knowledge. Watson, Modgil, and Modgil (1997) further explained that it is the freedom of a member of the academic community to write or speak the truth as “he/she sees it without fear of dismissal, demotion, withholding of merited promotion, adverse salary adjustment or censure by academic supervisors or by authorities outside the university” (p. 221). The concept of an academic freedom has its intrinsic meaning and is considered important to a learning community.

Hord (1997) also argued that PLCs serve to promote greater autonomy and decision making for academic staff. According to M. D. Cox (2004), the qualities necessary for community in FLCs include openness in which “participants can feel free to share their thoughts and feelings without fear of retribution” (p. 19). This is also supported by Wenger et al., (2002) who argued that CoP is a place “where people have the freedom to ask for candid advice, share their opinions, and try their half-baked ideas without repercussion” (p. 61). Freedom was also reflected in the empirical evidence collected from Samaras, Freese et al., (2008) where a sense of freedom, a feeling of autonomy (Beck, Kosnik, & Cleovoulou, 2008, p. 78) and a sense of ownership (Stern, 2008, p. 99) were found in different learning community practices.

Proximity and Mutual Engagement: Common Value Six

Proximity can be defined as “the feeling of nearness (social, cultural, psychological, or physical) a moral agent has for victims or beneficiaries” (T. M. Jones, 1991, p. 376). A large body of previous empirical studies indicated individuals help others like themselves more often than they help those who are dissimilar (see, for example, Baron, 1971; Ehlert, Ehlert, & Merrens, 1973; Karabenick, Lerner, & Beecher, 1973; Sorenson, Rivkin, & Fleming, 2006).

In the current Learning Organisation literature, the notion of learning in organisational theory is becoming to be conceptualised as a social process that heavily depends upon the relations among organisational members. Close proximity in workplace relations increases collaboration (Sanders & Emmerik, 2004; Sorenson et al., 2006), information seeking (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Breiger, Carley, & Pattison, 2003) and task accomplishment (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002). Based on the theories of proximity (see, for example, Festinger, 1950; Kiesler & Cummings, 2002; Korzenny & Bauer, 1981; Liben-Nowell, Novak, Kumar, Raghavan, & Tomkins, 2005), being close eases the developing and maintaining of social relationships and “this will in turn enable increased effectiveness and efficiency in learning” (Skerlavaj, Dimovski, & Desouza, 2010,

p. 192). Senge (2006) encouraged a proximal ‘learningful’ relationship among Learning Organisation members that is considered to have extraordinary impact on the organisation. He wrote, “seeing each other as colleagues and friends” is extremely important for the Learning Organisation, as “we talk differently with friends from the way we do with people who are not friends” (Senge, 2006, p. 228).

Proximity of learning community members also was identified as a focus to support, for example, PLC by a number of educational researchers (Hord, 1997; House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997). The relations of proximity in CoP also are well documented. For example, Lave & Wenger defined a CoP as “a set of relations among persons” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Wenger (1998) proposed that a list of indicators could be developed to prove a CoP exists, and most of them focus on mutual engagement (L. Li et al., 2009). That is, Wenger drew a CoP picture of a group of people who tightly cohere through sustained mutual engagement, and their proximity to each other can be either “harmonious or conflictual” (Wenger, 1998, p. 125). He further elaborated that a CoP was defined through nine forms of proximity: “sharing historical roots”; “having related enterprises”; “belonging to an institution”; “facing similar conditions”; “having members in common”; sharing artifacts”; “having geographical relations of proximity or interaction”; “having overlapping styles of discourses” and “competing for the same resources” (Wenger, 1998, p. 127). Therefore, proximity and mutual engagement results in the development of positive and supportive relationships.

Thematic Links to the Research Project

The literature review of Learning Organisation, Learning Community and related domains of knowledge, for this thesis presented in the earlier sections tended to be sourced independently of each other. The reciprocity of contextual knowledge, knowledge of cross-cultural comparison, and values of interdisciplinary perspectives rarely are addressed in the literature cited. An integrative conceptual

framework underlying this study has been developed, which synthesises six common values, and which provides a basis for the operationalisation of this research. These common values are, in this study, treated as the Learning Community Criteria (LCC) and featured the most referenced attributes from the review of the literature. Table 2.2 presents the summarised six LCCs operationalised from the literature and the authors who refer to each of these criteria.

The development of LCC as a synthesis of existing scholarly knowledge from various fields extends the literature and represents a new conceptual framework within which the Research Questions and sub-questions presented previously to guide this study could be answered. It functioned as the cornerstone of the methodology for this research.

Table 2.2
Criteria of Learning Community Operationalised from the Literature

Criteria	Common Values	Cited authors who refer to each of contributing Learning Community Criteria (LCC).
LCC1	Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals	Andrews & Lewis (2007); Bonk, Wisher, & Nigrelli (2004); Cowan (2003); DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many (2010); Hord (1997, 2004); Huffman (2003); Preston & Lengel (2004); Senge (2006); Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas (2006); Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002); Youngs & King (2002)
LCC2	Commitment to Continuous Improvement	Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace (2005); DuFour (2009); Ford, Voyer, & Wilkinson (2000); Fullan (2005); Hord (1997); Mitchell, McKenna, & Young (2008); Reichstetter (2006); Senge (1990, 1994); Sessa & London, (2006); Voulalas & Sharpe (2005); Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002)
LCC3	Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry	Andrews & Lewis (2007); DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many (2010); Hibbert (2008); Hord (2004); Huffman & Hipp (2003); Lieberman (2007); Schwier & Daniel (2008); Senge (1990, 1994, 2006); Shin & Bickel (2008); Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002)
LCC4	Supportive and Shared Leadership	Atak & Erturgut (2010); Berson, Nemanich, Waldman, Galvin, & Keller (2006); DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many (2010); Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour (2009); Enthoven & de Bruijn (2010); Hord & Sommers (2008); Little (2008); Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers (2007); Senge (2006); Viskovic (2006)
LCC5	Freedom of Group Membership	Ajayi, Goma, & Johnson (1996); Beck, Kosnik, & Cleovoulou (2008); Cox (2004); Hord (1997); Kosnik (2008); Senge (1990, 1994); Stern (2008); Vaast (2008); Watson, Modgil, & Modgil (1997); Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002)
LCC6	Proximity and Mutual Engagement	Berman, West, & Richter (2002); Borgatti & Cross (2003); Breiger, Carley, & Pattison (2003); Dimovski & Desouza (2010); Hord (1997); Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte, & Graham (2009); Sanders & Emmerik (2004); Senge (2006); Skerlavaj, Dimovski, & Desouza (2010); Sorenson, Rivkin, & Fleming (2006)

Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter has provided a review of the literature relevant to Learning Community and related domains of knowledge.

The literature suggests that many theorists and researchers have identified numerous frameworks, dimensions, characteristics, or attributes associated with a learning community and they have developed these in varied contexts. The aspiration to achieve diverse organisational goals in particular contexts leads to the concern of this research to understand how practitioners perceive their work contexts as learning communities. This chapter has critiqued the literature, and shown how stakeholders' perceptions of the learning community and what constitutes a learning community from a holistic cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective, have been largely ignored. This chapter has also analysed, synthesised and evaluated a number of contributory common values of learning community operationalised from the corpus of literature. This synthesis resulted in six contributory Learning Community Criteria (LCC) that are used as a conceptual framework in this research to examine stakeholders' perceptions in response to the Research Question and sub-questions presented in Chapter 1.

In Chapter 3, the Methodology of the research project will be presented. In this chapter, the research approach, research design and the methodology of data collection and analysis will be described.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The review of the literature presented in Chapter 2 indicated that within the research literature regarding learning community studies, the focus had been primarily on a single or narrow case. In contrast, this study examined learning communities operating in two university academic departments and two business organisations in Australia and China, respectively. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to elaborate the way in which the research design is justified and the mixed research approaches employed to gather, organise and analyse the data which were developed in order to address each research question.

First, in this chapter, a brief review of the important issues of equivalence in cross-cultural research and the nature of this study are presented, followed by a succinct justification for the reasons behind the selection of a descriptive qualitative research approach. Second, case study research is presented as the overarching research method and the nominated strategy. It then describes the research population being studied and the sampling strategy employed during data collection, the research instruments, and the design of the questionnaire and interview instruments, examples of which are provided in the appendices. Third, both quantitative and qualitative approaches employed to analyse the data obtained from the data collection methods of document analysis, survey-questionnaire and semi-structured interview are reported. Finally, the chapter addresses the ethical considerations, procedures used, and concludes with a discussion of the authenticity, trustworthiness, reliability and limitations of the study.

The Selection of Research Approach

The research approach to be employed in a study is one of the most intensely debated fields in the social sciences (Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006), if not the most, determining the success or otherwise of research. The research approach optimises the processes of the research activities, not the outcome of the research

project. (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Practically, it includes the instruments to be employed by the researcher to direct inquiry and assist to achieve his/her research objectives and aims. Theoretically, it reflects the orientation and ideology of the researcher, which in turn reveals the nature of the inquiry conducted with some presuppositions brought to the task by researchers.

In the social sciences there are two prominent research approaches, described typically as: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative research approach proceeds from the positivist or scientific paradigm, concerning the degree in which phenomena possess certain properties, states and characters, and the similarities, differences and causal relations that exist within and between these (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). On the other hand, the qualitative research approach is founded on the interpretivist or constructivist paradigm, and is inherently inductive, descriptive or exploratory in nature (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Yin, 2009). Central to the qualitative approach is the belief that different thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Burns, 2000; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) are deeply rooted in human experiences and they need to be unearthed, described and interpreted. Quantitative research works with fundamentally numerical data and treats data collection and data analysis statistically to test theories whereas qualitative research provides depth and detailed meanings of situations which cannot simply be captured by numerical facts in order to develop theories. Quantitative ‘purists’ believe social science inquiry should be objective (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Qualitative ‘purists’ contend that research is ‘value bounded’, and it is seen as impossible to separate value from inquiry; values are revealed in the way questions are asked and results interpreted (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). The debate of incompatibilities between quantitative ‘purists’ and qualitative ‘purists’ illustrates that both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are significant (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), but the field of application needs to be defined depending upon the issue and the research question (Flick, 2009).

The qualitative approach grounded in a constructivist paradigm is particularly appropriate for the present study because of its more holistic approach, treating the phenomenon of stakeholders as a whole system (Burns, 2000). In addition, the focus of the present study was to seek information emerging from people regarding their thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Burns, 2000; Ford et al., 2000), thus the approach and the design of this study was towards a descriptive qualitative approach (Stake, 1995, 2000) to elicit stakeholders' perceptions. "Only qualitative methods, such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing, permit access to individual meaning in the context of ongoing daily life" (Burns, 2000, p. 388). More specifically, this study was conducted in two countries to enable the comparison both within and between Australia and China, which fits well with the multi-faceted and interconnected nature of the qualitative approach (Yeung, 2004). Therefore, in summary, a qualitative study could explore and refine more details in meanings which university and business employees ascribed to their experience of stakeholders within contemporary Australian and Chinese contexts (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2008; Gibbs & Flick, 2007).

Selection of the Research Methodology

The qualitative research approach covers a number of research methods, such as phenomenology, ethnography, discourse analysis, narrative inquiry, grounded theory, action research, and case study. The choice of appropriate research methodology is dependent upon the research aim and research objectives of the study and the expected results. The main aim of this study was to investigate the nature of workplace learning, and particularly in two academic faculties and two business institutions to gain a deeper understanding of how stakeholders perceive their sense of a learning community in their particular work context. This study was, therefore, a collective case study (Stake, 2000) of the group of university and business employees within culturally multiple bounded systems (Creswell, 2009),

looking for patterns, consistency, and correspondence that fit within their boundaries (Stake, 1995).

Justification of the appropriateness of the case study methodology

Case study is one of the most prominent and widely used methods of social science enquiry that can be used to “gain in-depth understanding replete with meaning for the subject, focusing on process rather than outcome, on discovery rather than confirmation” (Burns, 2000, p. 460). Case study method can be defined as, for example, “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The case study approach was appropriate for the present research for the following reasons: (i) Case study research provides the best fit, initially, since the major focus of this study was to provide an overall ‘picture’, therefore, a holistic interpretation of a phenomenon (Burns, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2002; Sarantakos, 2005). This study was the development and an analysis of a two-by-two design (Isaac & Michael, 1997) where each of the four organisations could be considered a case, thus providing a holistic understanding which permits a fuller exploration of the issues in question (Yin, 2009). (ii) The intent of this present research was not to manipulate or modify existing theory, but rather, on the basis of each case, to gain in-depth perspectives (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) from a range of relevant individuals within their organisations, from which a better understanding about their perceptual similarities and differences could be drawn. In addition, this study attempted to gain a richer account of how Australian and Chinese employees in universities and business institutions perceive workplace learning. It can serve as a typical case study which yields ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973, 1975), searching for meanings that derive from human experiences.

The choice of the type of case study

There are different ‘types’ of case study. An instrumental case study (Stake, 1995, 2000), or a multiple case study (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2009), or a collective case study (Stake, 2000) are approaches which are appropriate for the present study.

An instrumental case study is a comprehensive in-depth investigations of a number of cases into an individual’s or a group’s experience (Stake, 2000), particularly if the phenomenon under investigation is experienced differently by a range of individuals. Instrumental case studies examine the case(s) in-depth, in that its contexts are scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed. However, Stake (2000) argued that in instrumental case studies, “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (p. 437). When a number of cases are studied at the same time in order to investigate the same phenomena, Stake (2000) termed this a ‘collective case study’ (p. 437). Yin (2009) also suggested that, a single case study is most suitable when the particular case is critical, extreme or unique, or where the single cases is the representative or typical, or revelatory of a large population.

The design of this research study can therefore be described as an instrumental case study extended to a number of cases. This study is not longitudinal research where the case is studied at different points in time. Rather multiple cases were examined in this study to extend the scope of the investigation to be more compelling, increase the potential for generalisability and yield more robust evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009), compared with single case design. The use of collective or multiple cases allowed the researcher to “investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2005, p. 445), and to search for cross-case and within-case themes in order to provide a stronger base for theory building and to capture novel findings that may exist in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Number of cases

Four cases were chosen to be examined in this study. There is obviously no simple answer as to the appropriate number of cases to be chosen for analysis in multiple case study research. The number of cases selected for analysis ultimately depends upon how much is known and how much new information is likely to be learned from incremental cases (Eisenhardt, 1991), and how rich and complex the within-case sampling is (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). While there is no precise number of cases required, the usual view is that four cases is the minimum as suggested by Hedges (1985), “in practice four to six groups probably form a reasonable minimum for a serious project” (pp. 76-77). In the same vein, Eisenhardt (1989) also argued that, “with fewer than four cases, it is often difficult to generate theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be unconvincing” (p. 545).

Cases in this study were selected from two types of institutions, rather than concentrating on a particular organisation, and across two countries, rather than focusing on a culturally homogeneous region. It was considered appropriate to select four cases in two countries (Australia and China) in two contexts (university academic department and business organisation) that are necessary to answer the questions of the study; it may be described, therefore, as a simple two-by-two design (Isaac & Michael, 1997).

Selection of the Sample

Approaches to sampling designs contribute to the legitimation of the study and the appropriate generalisation of results (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2006, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Samples selected from the four highly selected cases are expected to represent their target population to avoid sample bias (Burns, 2000). Therefore the method of selecting the samples was important to ensure that a general view of the target population’s thoughts, feelings and perceptions were well represented and not biased to any

particular group towards studying bounded systems. In this case study, ‘Opportunity’ and ‘purposeful sampling’ (Burns, 2000, p. 465; Creswell, 2008, p. 214) were employed to recruit a total sample number of 70 participants. The sample ($n = 70$) were not intended to be predictive or generalisable to a wider population of academics and business stakeholders in the two countries (Burns, 2000). However, for the scope of this study it attempted to give valuable insights into a range of users’ perceptions relating to learning communities, which may generate a certain degree of analytical significance to achieve representation (saturation) of a given social phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, 2008; Cropley, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Opportunity sampling

Opportunity sampling is a technique for selecting data sources, where researchers draw upon the knowledge of the setting being studied “to identify a sample, for example, using a researcher’s local knowledge of an area on which to base a study or using a researcher’s past experiences to contact participants” (Brady, 2006, p. 205). Denscombe (2010) stated that “opportunity sampling or convenience sampling is built upon selections which suit the convenience of the researcher and which are ‘first to hand’” (p. 37).

The opportunity sampling or convenience sampling (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007) in this study was selected on the basis of the availability of university staff members and business employees in the four case sites, with whom the researcher and his supervisor has established relationships; therefore, the selection of those cases were the easiest for the researcher to access and samples were most easily available to the researcher.

Purposeful sampling

Purposeful sampling (Burns, 2000, p. 465; Creswell, 2008, p. 214; Patton, 2002, p. 230) is an umbrella concept that serves as a unifying qualitative sampling

strategy in which “particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 88).

In this study, the utilisation of purposeful sampling is based on the fact that the intentionally selected cases are those deemed the most “information-rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 238) cases, from which “the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61), and therefore, the best to “understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2011, p. 206). The criterion for inclusion of cases took the aim of this study into account by integrating different institutions and stakeholders and by employing different sorts of data to allow a simple two-by-two cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparison.

For this study, the four cases, those were captured through the ‘Opportunity’ and ‘purposeful’ sampling, were:

- i) the employees of a known academic department at an Australian university during the second term of the 2009 academic year,
- ii) the employees of a known department at a Chinese university during the second half of 2008,
- iii) the employees of a known business in Australia during the first half of 2010, and
- iv) the employees of a known business in China, during the second half of 2008.

The participants were purposely chosen from these four institutions as they present a convenient method to ensure that the sample consisted of practitioners who were best positioned to provide the needed information and who had a more active and expressed interest in demonstrating the significance of their workplaces as learning communities in their specific contexts and had contributed to expansion of knowledge about it (Cropley, 2002). The decision to choose two universities and two business organisations in Australia and China to participate

in the study was based upon the information intensity within cases as well as different intensities among cases for the purposes of this study. The deliberate selection of this sampling approach was aimed to help the researcher understand the problem more clearly and to address the research question in this study (Creswell, 2009).

Research Project Timetable

Figure 1 shows the timeframe for major research activities.

Data Gathering Approaches

Data gathering approaches to research affective variables such as views, beliefs, attitudes and motivations have been used previously and are an important consideration for researchers. Given the cross-cultural and interdisciplinary nature of this study, it can be difficult to obtain a comprehensive and holistic picture of a complex setting by utilising a single data collection approach. A mix-method data collection approach was employed to provide indispensable data (Strauss, 1987) for this research. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected utilising three data collection instruments, namely, survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and documents. Though the last instrument can be seen as supplementary it is useful in collecting secondary sources of data (R. Kumar, 2011, p. 139). Figure 2 shows the main sources of gathering data in the study.

The data collected by these multiple methods are designed to capture the different stakeholders' perceptions about a learning community. This approach allows for the triangulation of different points of view (Burns, 2000) and contributes to the credibility, trustworthiness, and believability of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007).

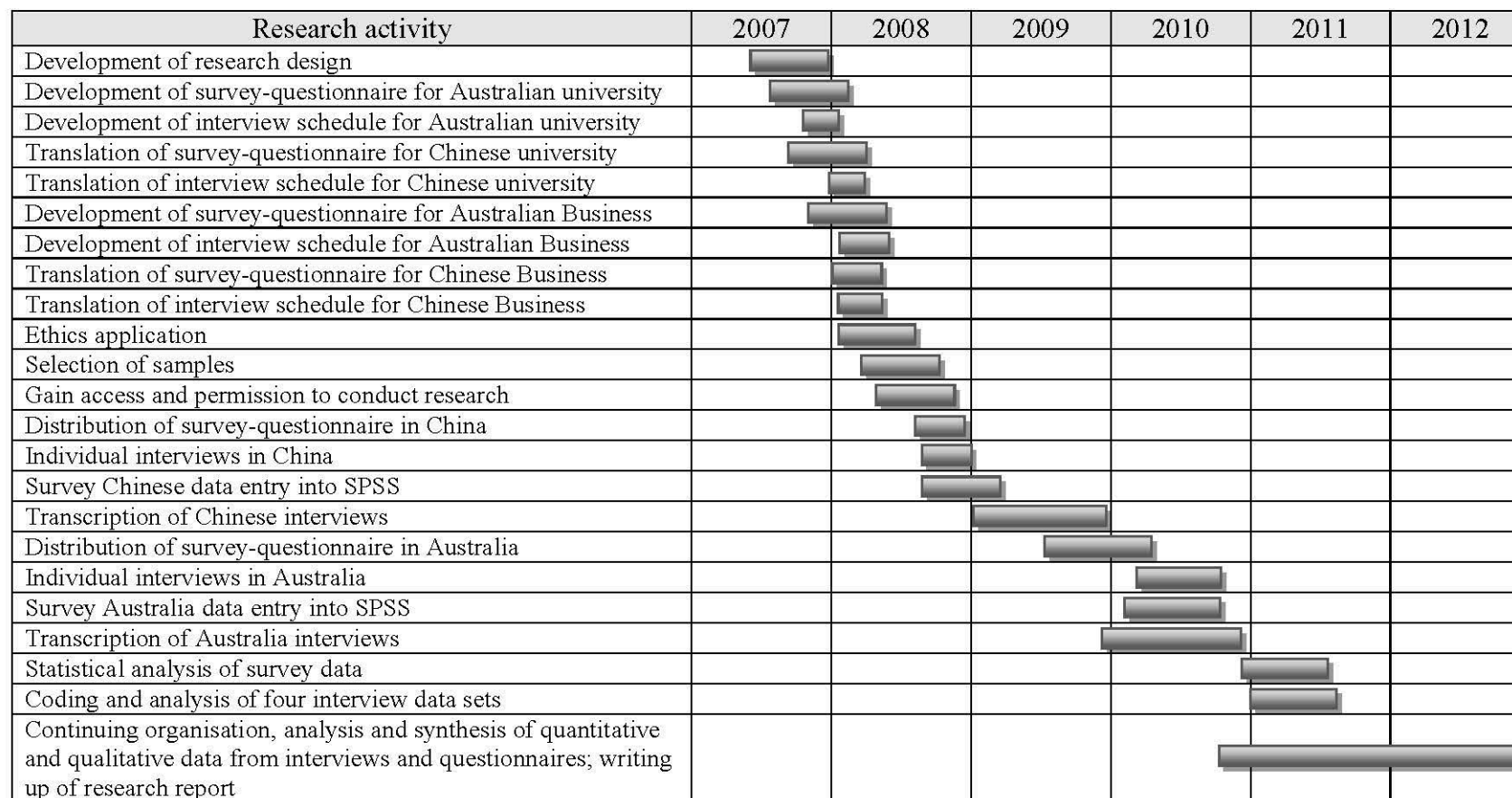


Figure 1. Timetable of research activity

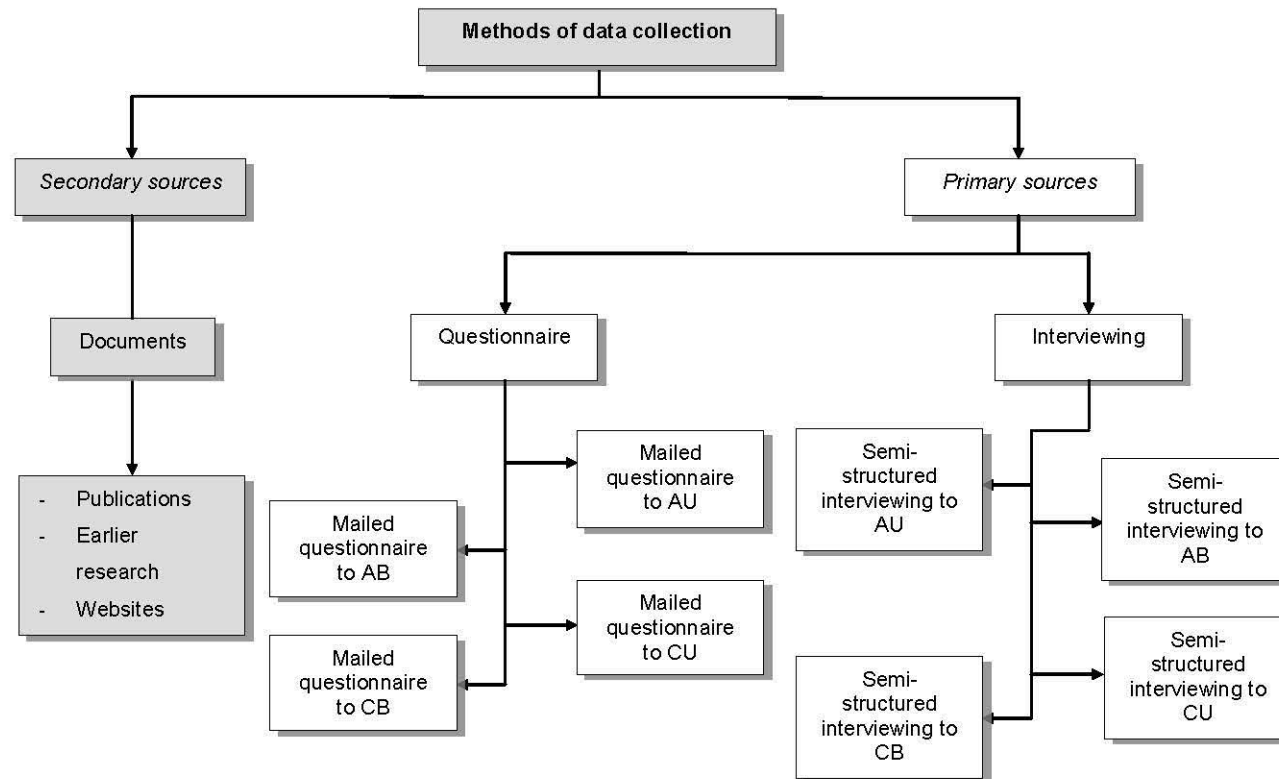


Figure 2. *Methods of data collection*

Note. AU = Australian University; CU = Chinese University; CB = Chinese Business; AB = Australian Business.

Phase I: Document Gathering

Documents can be treated as rich sources of information, grounded in the contexts that make the researcher aware of the current issues. As defined by Patton (2002), document analysis provides a “behind-the-scenes look” (p. 307) at the ‘official story’ of a social phenomenon that may not be directly observable.

Document analysis was chosen as a data gathering approach to collect secondary sources in this study. The documents studied were the published handbooks; annual reports; mission and vision statements; organisational vitae; descriptive values and goals and the government's policy related to each of the four institutional cases. Analysis of the documentary data was undertaken by reviewing retrospective information whereby the research act as ‘insider’ observers (Patton, 2002, p. 267). Document analysis helped with the design of the questionnaires and confirmed the questions on the interview instruments of the study and, therefore, increased the validity of the study by triangulating three data collection methods.

Phase II: Survey Questionnaire

There are reasons for collecting survey questionnaire data from each of the four institutions. Questionnaires are structured ways of collecting data from a population or a sample of a population (Burns, 2000). Although there are different methods that can be used across a wide spectrum of research situations, Denscombe (2010) argued that the survey questionnaire is in some cases “at their most productive” (p. 156) and in this study this method was used.

This study employed the survey questionnaire as a primary means of data collection, and a means of generating descriptive data (Burns, 2000, p. 566) from a larger number of participants with a broader perspective in a greater variety of educational settings and business contexts than could be done by other methods.

The important fact to note is that the survey enabled data to be gathered in a short period of time and with less cost.

The use of surveys facilitated the collection of a large amount of data from two fields within a very short time frame across two countries, and they also have the capacity to allow for thorough data analysis. In this study, cross-sectional surveys (Burns, 2000; Punch, 2005) were employed, to ensure that the required data could be collected within the allocated time and budget. The questionnaire used in this study was based upon the assumption that the respondents would be willing and able to give truthful answers (Burns, 2000). It was intended to provide accurate information and the researcher has confidence that the responses to the questionnaires are as full and honest as they can be (Denscombe, 2010).

Phase III: Semi-structured Interview

Interviews were used in this research to gather more detailed information about the issues raised from the responses to the questionnaire items. This was possible since interviews allow direct interaction between the researcher and the respondent. Therefore any unclear statements that came either from the interviewer or the interviewee could be repeated until a clear understanding was achieved. In addition the interviewer had more opportunities to ask additional questions which were not possible through questionnaires.

The semi-structured interview (Burns, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Wellington, 2000) was used to collect explanatory and supplementary information – and as a way of capturing different participants' perceptions about a learning community, referred to Research Question 1. It also allowed a richer understanding of the rationale behind the participants' interpretation of their own workplace learning in their practices, and the incidents, experiences and realisations referred to in the Research Question 2.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were utilised depending on the preference of the participants. A face-to-face interview enabled the researcher to observe the participants and use nonverbal communication and visual aids to achieve a better result (Neuman, 2007). However, telephone interviews were organised also with the participants who were not able to be physically present in a face-to-face interview.

Design of the Research Instruments

The underlying reasons that support the design of the research instruments for primary sources (see, Figure 2) were justified in the aforementioned section. On the basis of these, this section provides the detailed developmental procedures which include the actual adjustments and the changes made to the questions and statements of these instruments.

Design of the Questionnaire

According to Burns (2000) questionnaire design is vital to a successful study since “a well-planned and carefully constructed questionnaire will increase the response rate and will also greatly facilitate the summarisation and analysis of the collected data” (p. 574). A decision was made to develop new questionnaires more reflective of actual usage in the current setting for this research for the following reasons. First, although it has often been recommended (see, for example, DeVellis, 2003) to use a standard questionnaire that previously has been used and tested in past studies when investigating the same concepts, the unique nature of this study suggested that there was not a suitable existing questionnaire that could be used or modified to fit such specific cross-cultural and interdisciplinary contexts. Second, as shown in Chapter 2, six criteria were developed from the review of the learning community literature. These original six key criteria from the literature were used as a mechanism in analysing the extent to which each institution’s workplace was defined as a learning community, but cannot be measured directly in the available instruments. The

emphasis in developing the new questionnaire was to allow the six constructs of a learning community to be presented in the questionnaire instrument and to do so in a form of measurable statements/items or questions.

The questionnaire in this study was designed first in the English language, developed by the researcher and reviewed by the researcher's supervisor. It was designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to address the research questions. As the research was conducted with stakeholders in Australia and China, the research instruments were also presented in a Chinese mandarin language version which was clear and understandable to all Chinese respondents. The English version of the instruments was reviewed by an independent Australian University lecturer and the Chinese version was sent to an independent Chinese university lecturer of English for ensuring its content validity, readability and appropriateness to the Chinese context. The question items and statements in the questionnaire were further refined in light of the feedback suggested by both Australian and Chinese reviewers.

To recruit participants from both academic and business settings in Australia and China, two similar instruments but with slightly different wording were constructed to ensure that not only were they most suitable for the two different national cohorts, but also consistency was maintained to be comparable to both of them.

The final version had two sections incorporating a total of 48 questions covering 4 A4 pages (a copy of the survey-questionnaire guideline, final survey-questionnaire for University and survey-questionnaire Business are included in Appendix B1, Appendix B2 and Appendix B3, respectively).

Section A: Stakeholders' biographical profile

Questions pertaining to this section were grouped together in Section A, consisting of 4 forced-choice items and 4 open-ended items. In order to perform

relevant statistical tests, demographic and background data also were collected. The participants were asked: biographical questions, concerned with gender, age in year, nationality, highest qualification and time completed, position, type of employment, faculty/school, and years of work experiences.

Section B: Stakeholders' perceptions

The second section of the questionnaire items was developed from a comprehensive literature review regarding learning community studies. Question items in the instruments were designed to operationalise the experiences and concerns identified from the learning community knowledge base through a number of scale items which explored perceptions of practitioner knowledge, support received, professional learning accessed in their workplaces. Forty question items were designed to capture participants' perceptions. As indicated in Chapter 2, the literature review had suggested six constituent elements of a learning community as Learning Community Criteria (LCC), namely, Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals (LCC1); Commitment to Continuous Improvement (LCC2); Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry (LCC3); Supportive and Shared Leadership (LCC4); Freedom of Group Membership (LCC5); and Proximity and Mutual Engagement (LCC6). Consequently, 39 items were used to test these six LCCs. The details of these 39 items and relevance to each six LCCs are as follows.

Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

As indicated in Chapter 2, a match between the content of organisational mission/vision statement and organisational members' interests enabled a shared mission, vision, values and goals that became the focus of building and sustaining a learning community.

Four items were developed to explore the degree to which stakeholders perceived their organisational mission and vision statement in their respective work settings. These items are listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals (LCC1)

Item No.	Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals
Q02	Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?
Q13	Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals/The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals.
Q21	My university/company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.
Q22	My university/company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.

Commitment to Continuous Improvement

A review of the surrounding body of literature also highlighted that a learning community needs to be operated at institutions with an explicit commitment among all stakeholders to organisational continuous growth and development. 'Commitment to Continuous Improvement' was examined through five items from the questionnaire (item: 4, 12, 15, 22, and 33). These items are listed in Table 3.2.

Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry

A collective and collaborative focus is the heart of the learning community concept, as suggested by many researchers discussed in Chapter 2. The

Table 3.2

Commitment to Continuous Improvement (LCC2)

Item No.	Commitment to Continuous Improvement
Q04	To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?
Q12	My university/company is a learning community and goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.
Q15	Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.
Q22	My university/company is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.
Q33	I agree that commitment is part of our university/company identity as a community.

Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry scale consisted of eleven items. The items were adapted from a number of researchers who stressed the significance of collaborative culture and collective inquiry. For example, “working together to build shared knowledge on the best way to achieve goals and meet the needs of clients in exactly what professionals in any field are expected to do” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 4). Members of a Community of Practice have a shared domain of interest and in pursuing this interest they interact and learning together (Wenger, 1998). These items are listed in Table 3. 3.

Table 3.3

Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry (LCC3)

Item No.	Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry
Q03	In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?

Table 3.3

Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry (LCC3)(Continued)

Item No.	Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry
Q05	Would you say that your university/company prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?
Q06	Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff?/Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?
Q16	The ways in which university members/staff work and learn together are crucial to the development of university/business community.
Q29	I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.
Q30	I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.
Q31	I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.
Q32	I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my role.
Q34	I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.
Q35	My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.

Supportive and Shared Leadership

Supportive and shared leadership have been reported as a key driver in change by a number of researchers (Bolam et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2010; Hord, 1997) and support organisations to develop as autonomous learning communities oriented to shared decision making. The Supportive and Shared Leadership scale, composed of nine items, was used to tap into cross-cultural differences at the authority level. The designed items on this criterion were listed in Table 3. 4.

Table 3.4

Supportive and Shared Leadership (LCC4)

Item No.	Supportive and Shared Leadership
Q09	Do academics/employees see seniors as figures of authority?
Q10	Do you agree that academics/employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?
Q11	Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the university/company?
Q14	The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board/My company's goals should be established by the governing body of the company.
Q17	Faculty and administrators/Executive officers guide staff/employees towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.
Q18	Learning is a natural process and my university/company provides opportunities to facilitate it.
Q19	My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow/my company requires employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market.
Q36	My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.
Q39	In my work, the university/company has fostered a learning community where the leader who facilitated the learning of all staff members.

Freedom of Group Membership

Seven items were developed to measure freedom of group membership. Some items were related to how stakeholders perceive their freedom in their work contexts (Items 7 and 26). Some items were related to self fulfilment (Items 24 and 27). These items are listed in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5

Freedom of Group Membership (LCC5)

Code	Freedom of Group Membership
Q08	Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?
Q25	I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process.
Q27	My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.
Q28	I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.
Q37	I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.
Q38	I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.
Q40	Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university/business community are engaged.

Proximity and Mutual Engagement

Three items were categorised under this criterion, two of which (Items 23 and 24) related to mutual engagement (L. Li et al., 2009), and one (Item 26) related to proximity (Liben-Nowell et al., 2005; Sanders & Emmerik, 2004). These three items are listed in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6

Proximity and Mutual Engagement (LCC6)

Item No.	Proximity and Mutual Engagement
Q23	My university/company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.
Q24	My university/company gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.

Table 3.6

Proximity and Mutual Engagement (LCC6) (Continued)

Item No.	Proximity and Mutual Engagement
Q26	I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.

Each question item was responded to on a five point Likert scale (Likert, 1932, p. 181). This allowed responses to be gathered in a useable and analysable form (Burns, 2000; L. Cohen et al., 2007; Tuckman, 1972). The Likert-type scale gives “response options that indicate varying degrees of agreement with or endorsement of the statement” (DeVellis, 2003, p. 79). Respondents were asked to score their perceptions on a Likert scale from ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘Strongly disagree’.

Design of the Interview Questions

The development of the interview questions also was designed in the same manner as the section B in the questionnaire instruments, based on the six criteria operationalised from the literature. The interview was employed to capture in-depth perceptions of learning communities of different educational and business organisational practitioners in the Australian and Chinese context that was unrevealed in the questionnaire. Again, two similar versions of interview schedules were developed for university and business respectively. (see Appendix C for an example of the interview schedule for the semi-structured interviews and telephone interviews).

Ethics Considerations, Gaining and Maintaining Access

This study deals with human subjects, so the researcher must be aware of the ethics involved. The focus was the protection of human participants in this research. It was important to ensure that the information gathered, analysed and presented would not cause participants any harm or embarrassment.

To ensure appropriate ethics were upheld, the required proposal forms were completed and reviewed by the Faculty of Education Ethics Proposal Review Committee, University of Tasmania, and then submitted to the Northern Tasmania Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee for approval. Subsequent to receipt of the required approval (see Appendix D) on 6 August 2008, a letter (see Appendix E) was sent to the Head of School/Faculty at the case study universities and to the managers at the businesses asking if the researcher may speak to them by telephone or meet them in order to explain the study and invite their colleagues' participation. An information sheet explaining the study was included with the request. Upon obtaining the approvals, two similar but different approaches were used to recruit participants by incorporating seriousness but friendliness of tone, purposefulness but flexibility in approach, and openness but conciseness in presentation.

For the University School/Faculty:

The researcher sought an occasion when he could address potential participants with a five minute explanation of the study after the permission was granted from the Head of School/Faculty that the study may proceed in their institutions. Participants who agreed to complete the Questionnaire were able to collect a questionnaire at the end of the information session. All Questionnaires had a self-addressed envelope attached, and respondents were able to put the completed questionnaire into the envelope and left it at their faculty/administrator office for posting to the researcher. At the end of the Questionnaire there was an invitation for respondents to participate in an interview. A series of interviews formed the second stage of the study.

For the Business:

The researcher sought an opportunity to address the workforce to provide a five minute explanation of the study after the approval was granted from the manager who agreed that their enterprise would participate in the study. Participants who

agreed to complete the Questionnaire were able to collect it at the end of the information session. All questionnaires had a self-addressed envelope attached and respondents were requested to post it back to the researcher within 10 days. At the end of the Questionnaire there was an invitation for respondents to participate in an interview. This formed the second stage of the study.

All potential participants were provided with a copy of the Information Sheet (see Appendix F) and Statement of Informed Consent (see Appendix G).

The data report and storage in this study were also organised with the ethical consideration indicating that, questionnaire and interview transcripts would be held in a locked filing cabinet in the chief investigator's office and would be shredded after five years.

Data Collection Process (time-line)

During late-August 2008, survey-questionnaires were distributed to the Chinese university participants at an academic faculty and 20 participants returned survey forms with their responses. A series of four in-depth face-to-face interviews were held during September 2008. During October 2008, survey questionnaires were distributed to the Chinese business participants in one department and twenty participants returned completed survey forms. Following this, two participants agreed to participate in an interview. The collection of Australian data was conducted in 2009. During late August 2009, survey-questionnaires were posted to the Australian academic staff at an academic faculty and seventeen participants returned completed survey forms and five participants indicated their willingness to be interviewed. The interviews for Australian academic staff were conducted in October 2009. At the final stage of the data collection in this research study, survey-questionnaires were mailed to an Australian business during May 2010. Thirteen participants returned completed survey forms and three Australian business participants agreed to be interviewed.

Data Analysis Approaches

As data were based on the convergence of both textual and numerical data from three main sources, namely, (i) documents (ii) Questionnaires and (iii) semi-structured interviews, as detailed in Phases I, II and III, it was necessary to develop a systematically robust strategy for analysing those data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggested that data analysis in qualitative research was not simply a matter of classifying, categorising, coding, but more “about the representation or reconstruction of social phenomena” (p. 108). The different types of data collected in this study resulted in various ways of analysing and presenting the data. This particular study, as a mixed methods design, demonstrated convergence quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). A combination of both inductive and deductive data analysis processes of this study was employed under the framework of constructivist grounded theory, thematic analysis and content analysis. A variety of techniques were used to aid these analyses.

Analysis of the Document Data

The data collected from the documents in this study were analysed using a content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Krippendorff, 2004; Sandelowski, 1995), and has gained a position in qualitative research for analysing documents.

The analysis of a range of documents in this study was conducted in conjunction with interviews or questionnaires, as suggested by Wellington (2000). The document data analysis focused on content, such as: mission and vision statements, Handbooks, policy documents and annual reports. These document data were therefore analysed by content analysis to compare existing codes, categories or concepts with new ones as they emerge from further coding of the

data (Denscombe, 2010), as a “Constant Comparative Method” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159) in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Analysis of the Questionnaire Data

Organising and numerical coding of questionnaire data

As the survey-questionnaire involved both quantitative and qualitative data, computer-based programs were employed to assist data organisation and analysis. Quantitative data were entered manually into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 18.0. The variables in the questionnaires were coded (see Appendix H). Section A containing nine demographic items was coded by giving each option a numerical code, among which, three demographic items asking gender, position and type of employment were treated as nominal, one item referring to highest qualification was treated as ordinal data and other items were open-ended. The detail of these items formed were as follows: gender (Q1), highest qualification (Q4), position (Q5), type of employment (Q6), and another four permitted open-ended responses items measuring age in years (Q2), nationality (Q3), job description (Q7) and years of work experiences (Q8).

The 40 Likert scale items in Section B were coded on a 1-to-5 basis where 5 = ‘Strongly agree’, 4 = ‘Agree’, 3 = ‘Neutral’, 2 = ‘Disagree’ and 1 = ‘Strongly disagree’.

A scan of frequency distributions on all questionnaire items identified a few missing values that were unavailable from the surveys or failed to give a clear and unambiguous response on survey forms. A missing value analysis (MVA) was conducted and all missing values were recorded and then coded as zero which was reserved for not representing real meaningful data.

Rationale for analysing questionnaire data

The purpose of analysis of the quantitative survey data was to evaluate the differences in the means between/within the four demographic groups in participants' perceptions in order to address the research questions. This is related to a much discussed validity issue as to whether parametric or non-parametric analysis should be undertaken for statistical tests. The quantitative survey data in this study were decided to be analysed by parametric tests to address the two central research questions and the qualitative survey data were inductively divided into themes and coded for analysis corroborated with those from the quantitative data in the survey questionnaires.

Justification of parametric tests for quantitative data

First, the equal interval assumption was used for Likert-scale measurement of the dependent variable in questionnaires, and data represented an equal-interval level can therefore be subjected to statistical manipulations. Although there is evidence that the more scale points used, the more reliable the scale (Churchill & Peter, 1984), the assumption that a scale with more response points used stands a better chance of achieving equal 'intervalness' is rarely explicitly defined in the literature. A decision was made to employ a five-point scale system in the survey data as suggested by a number of researchers (see, for example, E. P. Cox, 1980; Nunnally, 1978) as it tends to confirm the extent to which the five-point scales are equal-interval, and appears to be more approximate in the context of the present study than the traditionally used response set.

However, the ordinal Likert scales of weighted scores measuring levels of agreement or disagreement are based upon the assumption that perceptions can be measured thereby the strength or intensity of preferences through experience, which is reflected in a linear continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Scores given to each ordinal scale items can be treated as equal intervals level

measures to allow processing with parametric statistical tests (Bowling, 2009; Burns, 2000; Ferguson & Cox, 1993; Polgar & Thomas, 2008).

In this study, the five-point Likert scale items as dependent variables in Section B of the questionnaires were thus treated as equal interval data and assigned the following numeric values: 1.00 to 1.50 points = Strongly Disagree; 1.51 to 2.50 points = Disagree; 2.51 to 3.50 points = Neutral; 3.51 to 4.50 points = Agree; 4.51 to 5.00 points = Strongly Agree.

Second, Levene's test of homogeneity of variance was also conducted to verify whether the variances were equal across two groups. As can be seen in Table 3.7, the results of Levene's test $F(1, 68) = 2.42$, $p = 0.12$ were not statistically significant indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variance across Australian and Chinese groups was rejected and thus the two variances were in fact equal.

Table 3.7

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	Df1	Df2	<i>p</i>
Scale	Based on Mean	2.421	1	68	.124
	Based on Median	2.535	1	68	.116
	Based on Median and with Adjusted df	2.535	1	67.543	.116
	Based on trimmed mean	2.544	1	68	.115

Third, a series of tests were conducted to check the assumption that two groups of data were sampled from a normal distribution of values on the dependent variables or at least from a distribution which is reasonably close approximation to a normal distribution. Two theory-based tests, namely Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test (Dallal & Wilkinson, 1986; Lilliefors, 1967) and Shapiro-Wilk (SW) test (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965) were employed along with quantile-quantile plot (Q-

Q plot) to compare graphically empirical quantiles with the theoretical distributions.

As can be seen from Table 3.8 that the normality assumption was met for Australian data based on the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test since both tests were not statistically significant ($p < .200$, $p < .270$, respectively). Based on both the KS-test ($p < .018$) and SW-test ($p < 0.001$), China values, however, tended not to be normally distributed.

Table 3.8

Test of Normality

	Country of permanent residence	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	<i>p</i>	Statistic	df	<i>p</i>
Scale	Australia	.099	30	.200 ^{**}	.958	30	.270
	China	.154	40	.018	.854	40	.000

^aLilliefors Significance Correction. ^{*}This is a lower bound of the true significance.

To further validate this assumption, Figure 3 and Figure 4 also showed the quantile-quantile plot (Q-Q plot) of Australia versus China distribution.

It is noteworthy that the Q-Q plot of Australia variables was all around the best fit lines suggesting that distributions given close to normality. The shape of the distribution of the China variables, however, implied a somewhat short-tailed distribution to the right with less variance as shown graphically with the Q-Q plot in Figure 4. In extreme value, the data from China can be deemed not to be normally distributed.

All the above diagnostic tests, along with the facts that the sampling procedures yielded non-random samples of respondents, justified that the questionnaire data in this study partially satisfied the assumptions of valid parametric statistical tests in analysis.

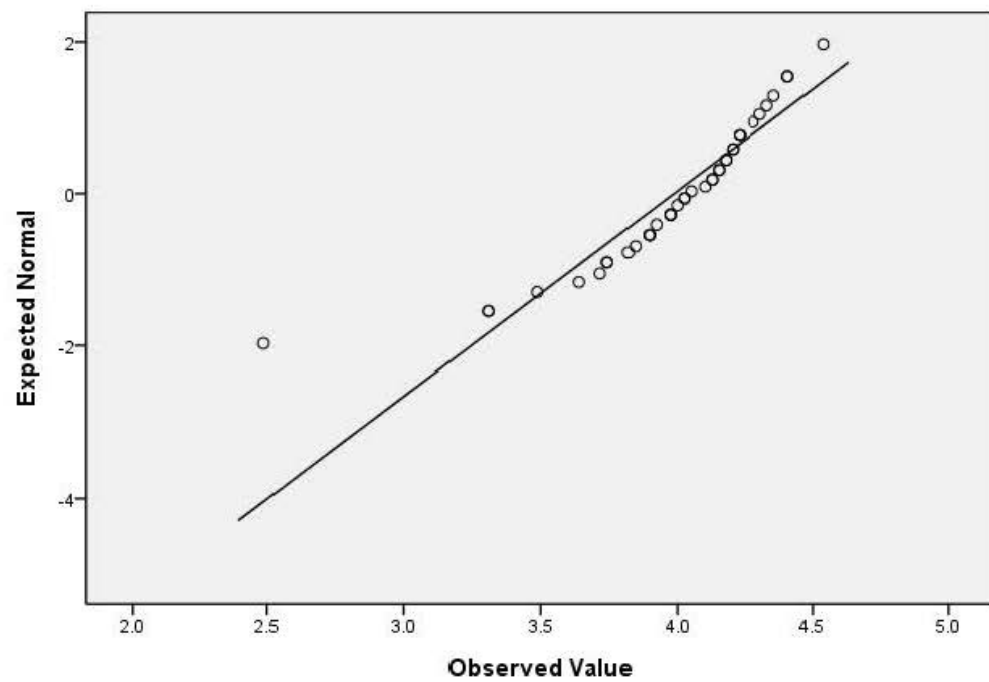


Figure 3. Normal Q-Q plot of scale for China

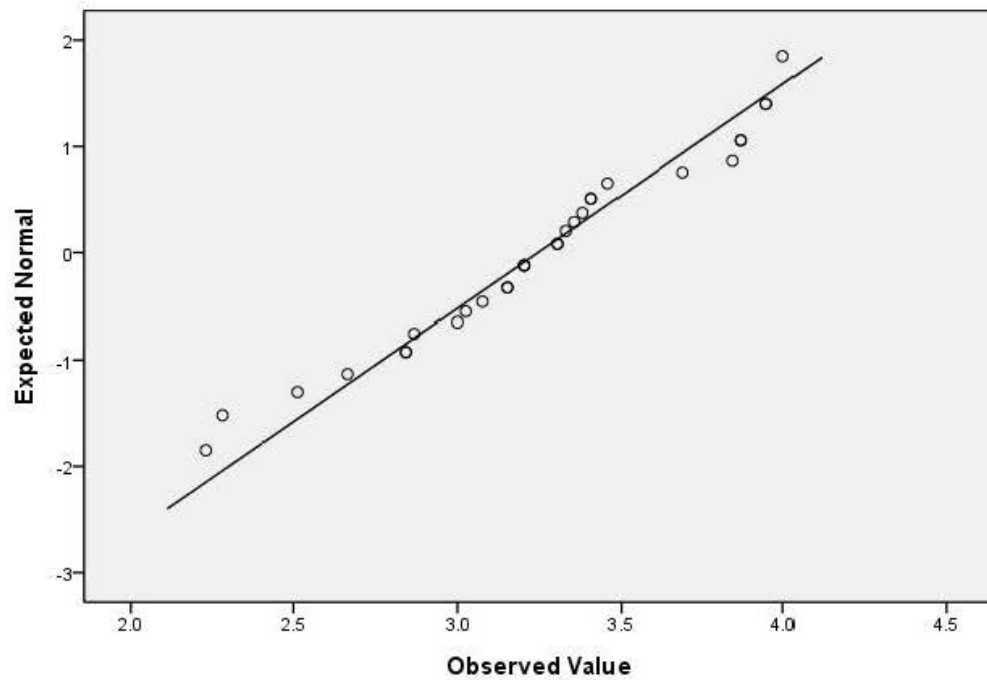


Figure 4. Normal Q-Q plot of scale for Australia

“Some statisticians have claimed that parametric tests are, in fact, relatively robust. This means that it is unlikely that the percentage probability will be very inaccurate unless your data do not meet the assumptions at all” (Burns, 2000, p. 152). When parametric test results such as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests from this study were compared with non-parametric test results, such as the Mann-Whitney U test, only very slight variations were apparent, suggesting that parametric tests in analysis of questionnaire data were valid to be used to make comparisons between Australian and Chinese respondents. The decision was also supported by many researchers (see, for example, Burns, 2000, pp. 151-152), arguing that the nature of parametric tests, which utilise more information from the data such as mean and standard deviation, have more power than non-parametric tests that are based on frequencies and ranking of data (Dancey & Reidy, 2007).

Analysis of demographic data

The first step of the quantitative analysis was the analysis of the descriptive statistics to summarise demographic information about each of the variables from the questionnaires in Section A. The frequencies, percentages, Mean values and standard deviations of the data variables were presented using graphs and charts produced by SPSS output. Demographic information was contained in eight items, four of which were forced choice items. Q2 requiring respondents to indicate their age in years resulted a range of responses from 20-80.

New variables were re-coded to simplify the data to 5 categories for descriptive analysis in a systematic way: (0) missing; (1) ≤ 29 years; (2) 30-39 years; (3) 40-49 years; and (4) 50 and above years. Q3 was considered critical to the analysis representing the respondent's home country of responses appropriate to the intended analysis. Q7 was treated as multiple response questions for analysis of job description and experiences and were coded accordingly. The demographic data of the sample were collected to provide a basis for subject segmentation.

Analysis of data related to Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do stakeholders perceive their work contexts as a learning community?

This research question was examined through all 40 questions from the questionnaire in Section B. A series of cross-case analyses were conducted to seek information on how differently stakeholders perceive their workplaces as a learning community. Four sets of analysis looking for differences were therefore performed separately for the two universities and two businesses in Australia and China to address each research sub-question.

Research Question 2: How do stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria fit with criteria operationalised from the literature?

As discussed in Chapter 2, the literature suggests six constituent elements of a learning community criteria, 39 items of the questionnaire in Section B were carefully designed to be able to clustered for cross-cultural analysis. Only the first item was left uncategorized as it was considered as a general item. These data were tabulated under the six categories to address these six criteria. Six sets of analysis using Fisher's analysis of variance (ANOVA) was therefore conducted respectively to analyse cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions towards each of the developed criteria, followed by an exploratory principal axis factor (PAF) analysis to examine to what extent all four groups of stakeholders perceived their work context as a learning community are related to the six defined criteria operationalised from the literature.

*Analysis of the Interview Data**Transcribing of Interview data*

The conversations that occurred in the interviews were recorded on audio-tape and made into transcripts to enable the analysis of interview data. All Australian

interview recordings were transcribed completely on a verbatim basis. The Chinese interview data were firstly transcribed in full in the original Chinese language, and then all the Chinese transcriptions were translated into English language by the researcher. The Chinese transcriptions were presented in line with the English transcriptions to ensure the wording were not only correct but also consistent in style. As suggested by Kvale (1999), an appropriate and consistent approach to transcribing is important to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. For an example of each interview transcript, see Appendix I: Transcript of Interview.

Organising and coding of Interview data

Based on constructivist grounded theory, a three-step coding approach, which included the (1) descriptive coding, (2) initial or open coding and (3) focused or selective coding stages (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), were employed in this study to organise the collection of the interview data, and permit a thematic analysis of the content data.

In the study, the interview data analysis began with descriptive coding (L. Richards, 2009), which assisted with the process of defining information about the cases being studied. The information stored were about, for example, gender, gender number, organisation, country, number of interviewee within the organisation, and date. The codes were presented as, for example, “(M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10)” or “(F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10)”. As such coding process, the relevant attribute data were imported from SPSS 18.0.

Initial or open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was proceeded through examining each line of data or set of lines, concerned with identifying, naming, categorising and describing actions or events with it. In this study, each non-numerical semi-structured interview data set was open-coded through a line-by-line (Glaser, 1978) analysis of the fresh data, that is, each line or paragraph was read to sharpen the use of sensitising concepts – those background ideas that

inform the overall research problem (Charmaz, 2003). These analytic procedures, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990), involved “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (p. 61) into discrete text segments, such as words, sentence fragments, sentences, or paragraphs (LaRossa, 2005), and then yielded critical themes which emerged from the data implicitly and explicitly, and which were later turned into specific categories where similar themes were collapsed into the higher order themes. This is also referred to as topic coding (L. Richards, 2009).

Further, focused or selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilised, the process of which is based on the use of line-by-line initial codes that “reappear frequently to sort large amounts of data” (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2011, p. 234). This coding features more directed, typically, more conceptual than line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 1983, 1995; Glaser, 1978). It is a stage of analytical coding that “comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (L. Richards, 2009, p. 102). Thus, the meanings of open-coded texts need to be presented in the context of the research. In this meaning making process, the focused coding stage in this study followed the same constructs of the research study as they emerged from examination of the literature. As reported in Chapter 2, six criteria of a learning community were captured as the conceptual framework in the findings of the literature review. Thus, six major constructs were easily identified and data available from all four groups of interviewees were extracted to see if they matched each of these six constructs. Data considered to be appropriate to the research aims and the intended analysis were then systematically organised into the six “core category” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 121), whereas other data that were deemed to be not appropriate to the Research Questions were not included in the coding procedure. Charmaz (2003) suggested that the categories for synthesising and explaining data arise from the focused codes, whereas in this study, six construct categories shaped the focused or selective coding procedure to enhance meaning making in constructing such a unique research agenda.

All the interview transcriptions were uploaded and analysed using a qualitative data analysis program QSR NVivo 9 along with the above two-phases coding approach. Originally developed as a qualitative software package for text analysis (T. Richards, 2002), and known in earlier versions as NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data* Indexing Searching Theorising), the most recent upgraded version, NVivo 9, is a program that can be used for organising and analysing unstructured information including documents, surveys, audio, video and pictures, and was chosen to use to simplify the coding procedure (L. Richards, 2009).

Analysis of interview data sets

The analysis of interview data was underpinned by the theoretical models of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hood, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wiener, 2007), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Liamputtong, 2009), and content analysis (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000; Flick, 2009; Mayring, 2004).

Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) has been widely used in qualitative research. It is a systematic inductive process which starts from the ‘ground’ where “researchers should be engaged with fieldwork as the fundamental part of the work they do” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 107). For the interview, constructivist grounded theory was employed as a major interpretive methodology with a promise of giving voice to the Australian and Chinese employees in university and business organisations different perspectives and reflecting the nature of mutual construction of knowledge between the researcher and the interviewees; that is, between “particular investigator and a particular object or group” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110) and between “the viewer as well as the viewed” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 522) in conducting research into complex human issues. Constructivist grounded theory provides opportunities for all four cohort participants themselves to reveal what is important for them through the use of fairly open questions, that locates their own interpretations on approaches to learning, firmly grounded in the field and the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011;

Glaser, 1998). The conceptual models of the interview data analysis in constructivist grounded theory developed from the interactive process, in which the researcher was able to “listen to the words of respondents and to give them a voice independent of that of the researcher” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 35), which reflects seeking meanings from both interview participants and the researcher.

Thematic analysis shares much common ground with grounded theory and is often combined in qualitative data analysis. While grounded theory postulates that, “categories and concepts inhere within the data, awaiting the researcher’s discovery” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 522), thematic analysis focuses on themes and subthemes emerging from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analyses of the interview data in this study were not only informed by elements of grounded theory to develop understanding of emergent themes and patterns of interviewees’ ideas or experience in an inductive way, but also were thematic in a deductive process, pulling out major themes from the grounded themes to test if six literature-defined themes existed or not. Themes emerged that could not meet any of the identified six themes from the literature or that were not otherwise appropriate to the research aims, were not considered further.

Content analysis also was valued in this study to analyse content in the interview transcriptions. This was done by counting the frequency of explicit words or phrases in a body of original content of interview data in order to identify common ideas coming through in the interviewee’ responses. The method of content analysis is employed deductively due to the structure of the interview analysis in this study being operationalised on the basis of the previous literature review of the knowledge base of learning community, and the purpose of the study is theory testing (Ragin & Schneider, 2011) rather than theory generating.

The above analysis approaches also were supported by QSR NVivo 9. Upon the completion of data aggregation, data organisation and coding, an NVivo project

therefore was created with all the interview data from four sites. This allowed for conducting, retrieving, and filtering searches for within-case as well as cross-comparison of four cases data, which assisted to form the basis for the interview data analysis.

Evaluation Criteria

Issues of goodness and quality are essential to judging the value of any research. Evaluative criteria aid in the judgement of research goodness and quality. Reliability and validity, albeit rooted in quantitative research, are considered to be of great significance, playing an evaluative role in all studies. Considering that this is a qualitative study located within the constructivist paradigm, employing case study methodology, the evaluative criteria that were used to test some rigour of this study tend to favour the terms ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 92) to reflect ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’. Trustworthiness is concerned with measuring the way in which the research may be judged through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 13; Trochim & Donnelly, 2007, p. 149) rather than conventional positivist and postpositivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 233) or Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 122) also added the additional category of ‘authenticity’ for judging the quality of qualitative research, namely, Fairness, Ontological authenticity, Educative authenticity, Catalytic authenticity, and Tactical authenticity. The evaluation criteria utilised for this study are shown in Table 3.9.

Each criterion was evaluated individually (see in the following sections) along with ways to assure the quality of data, the integrity of research design and the appropriateness of the research methods in pursuit of the research objectives constructed at the beginning of the research journey.

Table 3.9

Listing of Criteria for judging Methodological Quality in this Study

Evaluation criteria

Trustworthiness

Credibility (parallels internal validity)

- Internal consistency of questionnaire design
- Reliability of data analysis (e.g., parametric tests)
- Tape-recorded interviews and interview transcripts
- Multiple participants
- Multiple cases
- Triangulation

Transferability (parallels external validity)

- Thick description
- Multiple cases

Dependability (parallels reliability)

- Dependability audit

Confirmability (parallels objectivity)

- Confirmability audit/chain of evidence

Authenticity

Fairness

- Fair representation of different perceptions of the participants

Ontological authenticity

- Increasing understanding

Educative authenticity

- Perspectives of other members have been appreciated

Catalytic authenticity

- Findings has influenced the participants to change

Tactical authenticity

- Stakeholders and participants have been empowered to take action
-

Credibility (Truth Value)

Credibility, as the constructivist criterion, is analogous to internal validity in the positivist paradigm, which can be used to determine the extent to which the research findings are credible (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and correctly portray the phenomenon being investigated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), whether the effort to “establish confidence in the ‘truth’ of the findings” (Guba & Lincoln, 1991, p. 246) can be justified based on the rigor of the research design, reflected in the validity of the data collection, and achieved in the robustness of the research analysis.

In this study, credibility was enhanced through a number of avenues. One technique employed is that of ensuring the research instruments that were highly focused and well structured. The questions in the questionnaire instruments were carefully and consistently designed for both Australian and Chinese participants. The internal consistency of scaled items examining six constructs in the questionnaires was measured by observing the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient, based on the average inter-item correlation. Interview questions followed the same constructs of the questionnaire instruments to ensure consistency in research design. Another method to assure credibility is participant validation. The involvement of multiple participants located in two different countries with two foci developed multiple data sources, adding to the credibility of this study.

Transferability (Applicability)

The criterion of transferability judges the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied or generalised to other settings, contexts or groups. While the term transferability tends to be akin to external validity or generalisability in quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), in interpretivist research, however, generalisability is likely to be of less concern than for positivist and postpositivist research, as “cases studies and multicase studies [such as this study] are usually studies of particularization more than generalisation” (Stake, 2006, p.

8), and the “external validity of an inquiry cannot be specified” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

The pursuit of science seems to place the highest value on the generalisable, and the pursuit of professional work seems to value the particular most, but they both need both. For the multicase researcher, this is a dilemma (Stake, 2006, p. 7).

Stake (2006) concluded the possibility that most qualitative researchers in all professions are “deeply interested in the individual case without necessarily caring how it might represent other cases” (p. 8). Therefore, the transferability of findings of a qualitative study is methodologically dependent upon the match between the case study contexts and the context to which potential readers can meaningfully transfer the findings.

Transferability was addressed in this study through ‘rich and thick description’ (Geertz, 1975; Stake, 2000) of the participants and their cultural contexts, and ‘greater insight’ (Seidman, 1998) of the research design and interpretations of the findings. The likelihood of the findings that can be transferable depend upon the potential users of the findings of this study who are able to make the necessary comparisons about similarities that exist between the immediate research site and the site to which the findings are intended to be transferred, and then make judgements about credibility of the findings of this study to decide whether any study can contribute meaningfully to the situations of their own study.

Dependability (Consistency)

Dependability corresponds to reliability in quantitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and is concerned with the consistency of the research. The criterion of dependability measures the extent to which the research findings can be reproduced or replicated by another researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Similar to validity in quantitative research, in which “there can be no validity without reliability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316), “the same holds true for

dependability: there can be no dependability without credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability of this study was accounted for by carefully documenting data collection, interpretation, and data analysis procedures. The availability of the auditability providing detailed accounts of the research processes enables future researchers to track the entire research processes in order to replicate the study, hence enhancing the reliability and dependability of this study.

Confirmability (Neutrality)

Confirmability is parallel to the conventional positivist criterion of objectivity, referring to the degree of neutrality or the degree to which researchers and evaluators need to make judgements about the meaning of results and the extent to which those judgements might bias the results. In qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1994) defined confirmability as “relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases – at the minimum, explicitness about the inevitable biases that exist” (p. 278). In this sense, findings and conclusions depend upon the participants and inquiry itself other than a ‘fabrication’ from the ‘biases and prejudices’ of the researcher (C. Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 192).

In light of this, the criterion of confirmability of this study is judged by the way in which the findings and conclusions achieved the aim of the study rather than the result of the prior assumptions and preconceptions by the researcher. A ‘confirmability audit’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to ensure that the linkage between the data and the sources, and the research procedures that evidence and confirmation of the concepts and findings of the research were given as a ‘chain of evidence’ (Yin, 2009), thus, the readers are able to establish the conclusions and interpretations arise directly from them. By doing so, this study focused on understanding the ‘insider's perspective’ of university and business employees and their cultures, hence, increasing the confirmability of the study.

Authenticity

Beyond trustworthiness and its four criteria discussed above, naturalistic inquiry develops a second set of five criteria called authenticity criteria that enhance rigor in interpretation. Rather than looking to the methodological dimensions of a research account in order to judge its inherent value or “rigour in the application of method” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), it is also deeply important to examine the effects of a research study in reality, with the emphasis on the validity of voice for all stakeholders. Of particular relevance for evaluating this research were fairness, ontological/educative authenticity, and catalytic/tactical authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 121-122; Guba & Lincoln, 1989, pp. 245-251; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The fairness criterion evaluates the extent to which the different constructions and their underlying value structures are solicited and honored within the evaluation process. The ontological authenticity criterion implies the extent to which the individual’s or group’s conscious experience of the world became more informed or sophisticated.

In the research analysis of this study, different perceptions, concerns, and voices of all stakeholders who were involved in the data collection phases were presented and articulated accurately and fairly. The variety of claims, both for and against reported from each participant in the four case organisations were deemed to be valuable, thus, the research can be judged to be fair. The ontological authenticity criterion was validated through the in-depth interviews that were conducted between the researcher and the participants. As the design of this study combined both deductive and inductive approaches as outlined above, it started with a deductive approach whereby six themes that were based on a search of the literature on the meaning of the term ‘learning community’, to examine the participants’ perceptions of their workplace learning in two culturally different countries and two interdisciplinarily different organisations. Interviewees participated in this study raised a heightened awareness of and capacity to reflect

on issues in their own learning environments. Through the knowledge gained that was jointly created in an interaction between the researcher and the interviewees (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), the researchers were able to identify that the interview participants not only came to understand the initial meaning of ‘learning community’, but also provided more insights into their learning experiences with new understanding about their roles as learners and how they construct their own meanings in being involved in learning.

Educational authenticity, which “represents the extent to which individual respondents’ understanding of and appreciation for the constructions of others outside their stakeholding group are enhanced” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 248), also became salient in this study. As four groups of participants in this study provided views vary considerably, but all were equally relevant and appreciated. Catalytic authenticity assesses the extent to which action is motivated, while tactical authenticity evaluates the extent to which participants are empowered to act. A strong sense of catalytic authenticity was stressed through the research process that encouraged participants to reconsider their practices for creating and sustaining their own learning communities and seek ways to improve their practices more consistent with their personal and organisational goals. In addition, implications and suggestions, which serve as an impetus to empower stakeholders for further reflection in action, were drawn upon the findings, evidencing its tactical authenticity.

Summary of Chapter 3

This chapter has considered the question of research approach and described a study grounded in a constructivist view of knowledge. It has also outlined a methodological triangulation-based data collection methods embedded in the research design. The processes of data gathering and data analysis for the survey-questionnaire and follow-up interview have been delineated.

In the following chapter, the findings yielded from the data analysis processes will be discussed in the context of the research aim and the contributing Research Questions.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction and Overview

This chapter presents the results of data analysis from the four cross-cultural and institutional cases utilising the mixed research methods described in the previous chapter. The data analysis and results reported in this chapter are related directly to each of the research questions in order to address the broad research aim of this study, namely, to examine the extent of stakeholders' perceptions on their sense of a learning community in their particular work context. In addressing this broad research aim, the results of the collected data analysis were reported to address the following two research questions in this study.

Research Question 1

How do stakeholders perceive their work contexts as a learning community?

- 1) Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions?
- 2) Are there institutional differences in stakeholder perceptions?

Research Question 2

How do stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria fit with criteria operationalised from the literature?

- 1) How do stakeholders perceive each of the developed criteria that define learning community?
- 2) Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions of learning community towards each of the developed criteria?
- 3) To what extent do the operationalised criteria fit stakeholders' perceptions?

Since the design and the research methodology incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection, the results obtained from the questionnaire and

interview data (both quantitative and qualitative), are presented as findings in this chapter.

The quantitative data analysis involved various types of statistical analysis. The data from the survey questionnaire were first organised and analysed utilising Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. The first step of the quantitative analysis was the use of descriptive statistics to summarise demographic information about each of the variables from the first section of the questionnaire. The frequencies, percentages, mean values and standard deviations of the data variables were presented using graphs and charts produced by SPSS output.

The second section of the questionnaire comprised a number of Likert scale questions, corresponding to six Learning Community Criteria (LCC) developed from the literature review, that addressed the research questions. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) analysis was utilised to test whether a statistically significant difference existed in the mean values between two groups of cases, such as two geographical locations – Australia and China, or two organisations – Academics and Business with regards to the Research Question 1.

The ANOVA test was selected also to explore the significant difference across cases, such as a cross-cultural comparative analysis of two academic and business institutions, and thus formed a two-by-two cross-cases analysis.

Factor analysis was performed (i) to find out whether six operationalised criteria of a learning community from the literature to measure stakeholders' perceptions are related to each other and not to indicators that are supposed to measure other criteria, and (ii) to look for a way the data may be refined, summarised and retained coherent factors which are strongly interrelated among each contributing item to each learning community criteria.

The level of significance for the ANOVA and factor analysis was set at a value of p less than or equal to 0.05. If the observed p value was 0.05 or less, the result was considered statistically significant, otherwise if it was more than 0.05, the test was considered non-significant statistically. In addition, a p value of less than or equal to 0.001 were accepted as highly statistically different to determine a more rigorous testing of the significance level.

Semi-structured interviews assisted to contextualise the analytical findings of the numeric data, and enabled a more complete understanding of stakeholders' perceptions. The analysis of qualitative data was processed by QSR NVivo 9 for categorising participant responses.

Demographic Information

In this study, for participants in the questionnaire, 70 participants were recruited from stakeholders who were employed at the four organisations.

Table 4.1 presents the demographic profile of the academic and business respondents from Australia and China in the sample.

Overall the numbers of male and female respondents across the four settings were almost equal. However, in the university settings, male respondents outnumbered female respondents – 64.7% to 35.3% in AU and 65% to 35% in CU. In the business sectors, female respondents outnumbered their male counterparts with similar percentages of 65% and 53.8% in CB and AB respectively.

As shown in Table 4.1, if total number of respondents is considered, there seems to be an equal distribution of participants' age. However, there were significant differences between the ages of participants in Australian and Chinese settings. In the Chinese cohorts, the under 29 years old were highly represented, at least in the business sector (85% in CB). The age group 30-39 years were also well represented (for example, 55% in CU). In the Australian cohorts, older age groups were well represented (41.2% were 50 years and above in AU), whereas the

youngest group in the university group were 30-39 years (35.3%). The Australian Business sector differed from the Chinese Business sector in that there was an equal number of participants with ages under 29 years (30.8%), 30-49 years (38.5%), and 50 years and above (30.8%).

Table 4.1 revealed a difference between the levels of the qualifications between the respondents in the Australian and Chinese university samples. Participants in the Chinese University held higher levels of qualifications (70% held Doctoral degrees), whereas in the Australian University, 52.9% of respondents held Doctoral degrees, and 41.2% of participants held Masters degrees. The qualification level for respondents in the business sectors, however, was reversed. Respondents in the Chinese sample held Bachelor level qualification (90%). In the Australian sample, 46.2% held qualifications at Masters level, and 7.7% held Doctoral degrees.

In order to better understand the participants' work context, respondents were asked to indicate their job position as either academic staff/manager or general staff in their respective organisations. The total sample consisted of 41 academic/manager level and 28 general level staff, representing 58.6% and 40% of the sampled participants, respectively.

As evidenced by statistics in Table 4.1, there was a preponderance of academic staff represented in the university sample. All AU participants were academic staff. In CU, 75% of those surveyed in this study were academic staff and the remainder were general administrative or professional staff (4, 20%). Of those business participants, general staff outnumbered managers.

Table 4.1 showed that, a majority of the respondents (59, 84.3%) in the sample of this study were employed full-time. Of those, there were 14 (82.4%) in the AU, 19 (95%) in the CU, 14 (70%) in the CB, and 12 (92.3%) in the AB.

Table 4.1

Demographic Profile of Sample from Four Organisations

Demographic factors	AU		AB		CU		CB		Overall	
	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within sample
Gender										
Male	11	64.7	6	46.2	13	65.0	7	35.0	37	52.9
Female	6	35.3	7	53.8	7	35.0	13	65.0	33	47.1
Age (Years)										
≤ 29	-	-	4	30.8	1	5.0	17	85.0	22	31.4
30-39	6	35.3	2	15.4	11	55.0	2	10.0	21	30.0
40-49	3	17.6	3	23.1	5	25.0	1	5.0	12	17.1
50 and above	7	41.2	4	30.8	3	15.0	-	-	14	20.0
Missing	1	5.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.4
Academic qualification										
Bachelor	1	5.9	2	15.4	4	20.0	18	90.0	25	35.7
Master	7	41.2	6	46.2	2	10.0	2	10.0	17	24.3
Doctorate	9	52.9	1	7.7	14	70.0	-	-	24	34.3
Other	-	-	4	30.8	-	-	-	-	4	5.7

Note. AU = Australian University; AB = Australian Business; CU = Chinese University; CB = Chinese Business

Table 4.1

Demographic Profile of Sample from Four Organisations (Continued)

Demographic factors	AU		AB		CU		CB		Overall	
	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within organisation	<i>n</i>	% within sample
Position										
Academic staff/Manager	17	100.0	6	46.2	15	75.0	3	15.0	41	58.6
General staff	-	-	7	53.8	4	20.0	17	85.0	28	40.0
Missing	-	-	-	-	1	5.0	-	-	1	1.4
Employment status										
Full-time	14	82.4	12	92.3	19	95.0	14	70.0	59	84.3
Part-time	3	17.6	1	7.7	1	5.0	6	30.0	11	15.7
Years of work experience										
Less than 5	4	23.5	5	38.5	8	40.0	15	75.0	32	45.7
5-15 years	9	52.9	5	38.5	7	35.0	3	15.0	24	34.3
16 and more	4	23.5	3	23.1	5	25.0	2	10.0	14	2.0

Note. AU = Australian University; AB = Australian Business; CU = Chinese University; CB = Chinese Business

Table 4.1 also represented the frequencies and the percentages of the years of work experience for each organisation participated in the study. The majority of the AU respondents had 5-15 years work experiences (9, 52.9%). In CU, 8 (40%) respondents representing the majority had less than 5 years work experience.

While the two university samples exhibited a diverse age range, the majority of the respondents from CB had less than 5 years work experience (15, 75%), mostly because most of them were aged less than 30-39 years. There was an equal number of participants (5, 38.5%) who were less than 5 years or 5-15 years work experiences in the AB.

Data Analysis Related to Research Questions

In order to address each of the two research questions, two types of data analysis were required and the data were extracted independently. The abbreviations used as variable names in the following data analysis are shown in Appendix H.

Research Question 1: How do stakeholders perceive their work contexts as a learning community?

Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions?

All four organisational groups were subject to a series of one-way ANOVA analysis in pairs between nations or between organisations to test whether there are significant differences in the mean scores on these scale items across the four groups.

a) Comparison of Responses to Questionnaire Items by University Business Stakeholders by Nationality

The Chinese University academic staff on average gave more scores at the level 4 (agree) range on the 1 to 5 point Likert scale, whereas the Australian academic staff were more likely to give responses to the questions in the middle range

around the 3 level on the five point Likert scale. The responses shown in Appendix J1 comparing the Australian and Chinese University Business staff, show the Chinese respondents made statistically significantly more positive responses about the role and purpose of the university in ‘forming’ positive outcomes. They also rated their university higher compared to their peers in Australia as a learning community where positive actions occur. Of the 40 questions concerning the perceptions of a sense of learning community in the survey the Chinese academic staff rated 32 of these items statistically significantly higher than the academic staff located in Australia. Interestingly, across the table in Appendix J1 there was no item to which the Australian academic staff rated the question higher when compared to the Chinese academic staff.

On a number of questions (8 out of the 40 questions) the Australian and the Chinese academic staff rated questions in a similar way. That is, there were no statistically significantly differences between the two cohorts on these eight items (see in Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Similar Perceptions between University Cohorts across Culture

Item No	Questionnaire Items
01	In general, to what extent are you satisfied with the university work context?
03	In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?
09	Do academics see their seniors as figures of authority?
10	Do you agree that academics are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?
11	Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the university?

Table 4.2

Similar Perceptions between University Cohorts across Culture (Continued)

Item No	Questionnaire Items
14	The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board.
27	My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.
28	I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.

b) Comparison of Responses to Questionnaire Items by Business Stakeholders by Nationality

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the scale questionnaire items to investigate the statistically significant differences in the perceptions of employees in Chinese Business and Australian Business. For each ANOVA analysis, scores on scale items of the questionnaire were constructed as dependent variables and four organisational groups where two business organisations were selected to be treated as the independent variable (referred to as a factor in SPSS). There were 18 statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level between mean scores for the two national business groups, among which 4 items were highly significant, namely, Item 2, $F(1, 31) = 20.855, p < .001$; Item 4, $F(1, 31) = 27.918, p < .001$; Item 8, $F(1, 31) = 97.831, p < .001$; and Item 36, $F(1, 31) = 12.19, p < .001$. These items are described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Highly Significant Difference: Business Cohorts across Culture

Item No	Questionnaire Items
02	Do you understand the vision and mission of the company?
04	To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the company?

Table 4.3

Highly Significant Difference: Business Cohorts across Culture (Continued)

Item No	Questionnaire Items
08	Do you agree that employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my company?
36	My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.

Of these four highly different items, Australian employees rated 3 of these items (Item 2, $M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.28$; Item 4, $M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.87$; Item 8, $M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.00$, respectively) statistically significantly higher than the Chinese employees (Item 2, $M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.52$; Item 4, $M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.41$; Item 8, $M = 2.65$, $SD = 0.49$, respectively), whereas the mean value of the Australian employees on Item 36 ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 0.99$) was statistically significantly lower than Chinese employees located in the Chinese Business ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.02$), suggesting that employees' feelings of isolation were not being recognised in Australian Business and there is a need to provide support to help with negative emotions. A detailed overview of the cross-cultural differences between business cohorts is presented in Appendix J2.

Are there institutional differences in stakeholder perceptions?

a) Comparison of Responses to Questionnaire Items by Chinese Stakeholders by Occupation

Institutional differences also were considered, with samples being drawn from interdisciplinary stakeholders, which took account of differences in perceptions, which existed between educational and organisational business organisations.

There were 10 statistically significant differences found in 40 questions between Chinese University and Business cohorts. They are shown in Table 4.4:

Table 4.4

Significant Difference: Chinese Cohorts across Different Institutions

Item No	Questionnaire Items
04	To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?
08	Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?
17	Faculty and administrators/Executive officers guide staff/employees towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.
18	Learning is a natural process and my university/company provides opportunities to facilitate it.
26	I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.
29	I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.
30	I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.
35	My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.
38	I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.
39	In my work, the university/company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.

The data in Table 4.4 indicated that the major differences between the two Chinese cohorts focused on freedom and authority, and those questions related to their learning capabilities and behaviours. There was a stronger expression of concern in the University than in the Business sample. University academic staff rated themselves as being more ‘respectful’ of authority and that discipline was imposed on them. Business respondents reported more freedom in their work place and held less negative perceptions in relation to authority and administrative power.

In general, Chinese University academic staff reported statistically significantly higher mean values than those participants in the Chinese Business, with means around 4 (points) higher on the five point Likert scale, indicating a higher level of agreement.

A similar pattern of findings in regard to the two groups of Chinese responses is reported in Appendix K1. In 30 out of the 40 questions, no statistically significant differences were noted in the means of the two Chinese organisations, suggesting that the two Chinese cohorts shared more similarities than differences.

b) Comparison of Responses to Questionnaire Items by Australian Stakeholders by Occupation

A one-way ANOVA analysis was calculated for each of the questionnaire items to investigate the statistically significant differences in the perceptions of participants in the Australian University and Australian Business stakeholders. For each ANOVA, scores on scale items were used as the dependent variable and four organisational groups; where two Australian organisations were selected to be treated as the independent variable. There were 8 statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level in mean scores for the two Australian groups, among which 4 items were highly significant differences (see Table 4.5). They are Item 2, $F(1, 28) = 20.160, p < .001$; Item 4, $F(1, 28) = 16.941, p < .001$; Item 8, $F(1, 28) = 63.375, p < .001$; Item 20, $F(1, 28) = 14.981, p < .001$.

Table 4.5

Significant Difference: Australian Cohorts across Different Institutions

Item No	Questionnaire Items
02	Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?
04	To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?

Table 4.5

*Significant Difference: Australian Cohorts across Different Institutions
(Continued)*

Item No	Questionnaire Items
08	Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?
20	My university/company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.

Of these four highly different items, Australian University academic staff reported statistically significantly lower means than those participants in Australian Business. There was a highly significant difference in participants' understandings of the vision and mission statements of their organisations (Item 2) between the two groups of Australian participants. The mean values of the Australian University respondents ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.75$) were lower than those reported in Australian Business ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.28$). The low means for Australian University participants suggested that for Item 2 relating to shared mission and vision, the Australian academic staff had a weak sense of their organisation's directions compared to the Australian Business participants. This finding is consistent with the corresponding questionnaire Item 20, which asked whether the vision of both Australian University and Business was shared and the values are explicitly set. Similarly, Australian University academic staff reported a lower mean score and a larger standard deviation ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.09$) than the Australian Business participants ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.75$), indicating that there was a lower level of agreement with respect to Australian University participants' perceptions of shared university vision and on explicit set of values. The findings also suggested that those who reported their institutions have a shared vision and explicit set of values were those who reported the most understanding in organisational mission and vision. More details relating to the comparison of responses between two Australian cohorts are given in Appendix K2.

Research Question 2: How do stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria fit with criteria operationalised from the literature?

A survey of the literature (up to 2012) suggested six salient criteria on how a learning community operates successfully (see Table 2.2, in Chapter 2), with each criterion serving as a catalyst for successful learning community. The following results were the analysis of these six criteria which highlight the importance of stakeholders evaluating learning community practice in their own contexts. These results address the second research question and substantiate the six Learning Community Criteria (LCC) operationalised from the literature review.

How do stakeholders perceive each of the developed criteria that define learning community?

As reported in Chapter 3, there were 40 scale items that were designed to capture participants' perceptions about 'learning community', the first question (Item 1), "to what extent are you satisfied with your work context?" was the more general and each of the remaining 39 question items was aggregated into one of six clusters contributing to test each of the six LCCs.

Univariate descriptive statistical tests were performed to investigate more closely the LCC evaluation perceived by all four cohorts of survey respondents. Means and standard deviations were calculated firstly for each of the 39 items. Each LCC mean score was therefore obtained as the average of the means of all respective contributing items to each LCC. Each LCC standard deviation value also was calculated as the average of the standard deviation of all respective contributing items to each LCC. Internal consistency reliability was observed by using Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of each LCC item scale.

The details of these 39 items, relevance to each of the six LCCs, each LCC mean and standard deviation, and alpha coefficients are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Summary of Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach alpha for Scores on Each of the Six LCCs

Code	Learning Community Criterion (LCC)	No. of items	M^a	SD^b	α
LCC1	Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals	4	3.54	1.05	.71
LCC2	Commitment to Continuous Improvement	5	4.00	1.00	.73
LCC3	Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry	11	3.71	0.97	.83
LCC4	Supportive and Shared Leadership	9	3.14	1.04	.70
LCC5	Freedom of Group Membership	7	3.98	0.93	.80
LCC6	Proximity and Mutual Engagement	3	4.27	0.87	.86

^aThis mean was obtained as follows: The values for each of the contributing items were added and then the sum was divided by the number of items contributing to the criterion. ^bThis standard deviation was obtained, from the sum of the values for each of the contribution items added, and then divided by the number of items contributing to the criterion.

Table 4.6 shows the descriptive statistics for the stakeholder perceptions about the six LCCs developed from the literature. Internal consistency among each of the six LCCs ranged from moderate to strong (.70 to .86), indicating that the reliability of the criteria scale was acceptable (Guilford, 1954).

The overall LCC1 mean value for survey respondents was 3.54, which suggested that generally survey respondents were unsure that their organisational mission, vision, values and goals are shared within the organisations. The data indicated general agreement with LCC2 ($M = 4.00$), suggesting that most survey respondents were committed to organisational continuous improvement. Most participants were less positive in their support of LCC3 ($M = 3.71$), suggesting that collaboration and collective effort among the four organisational cohorts needed to improve. There was neither strong agreement nor disagreement towards the statement that leadership behaviours were supportive and leadership relationships were shared ($M = 3.14$), revealing that all survey respondents'

perceptions tended to be neutral towards LCC4. There was relative agreement with LCC5 measurement, which suggested that all survey respondents gained feelings of freedom in their workplaces. The data also showed that strong positive perceptions regarding proximity and mutual engagement were held by all survey respondents (with the total LCC6 mean value being 4.27).

Overall, the results of the descriptive analysis drawn from the questionnaire showed that the six LCC mean values were all greater than 3 (the mean on the five point Likert scale). An examination of how stakeholders perceived each of the developed LCC found that survey respondents tended to agree more than disagree with each of the LCC items.

The values for the standard deviation for the six LCCs were 1.05, 1.00, 0.97, 1.04, 0.93, and 0.87, respectively, indicating that there was a wide spread of participants' responses. The following analysis illustrates the complexities in terms of the perceptions of learning community generated by each of the six LCCs. Four cohorts of participants were analysed within a two-by-two comparison, which not only draws parallels between cross-cultural differences, but provides valuable insights into how stakeholders perceive differently within their institutional contexts.

Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions of learning community towards each of the developed criteria?

A further analysis was conducted to test whether there were statistically significant differences in the means of item measures for the two Australian and two Chinese cohorts. As each of the six LCCs involved a number of contributing items, a table was presented at the beginning of each LCC section which provided an overview of the major statistical results gained in the area operationalised in the learning community research.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to measure whether there were statistically significant differences in the means for the two countries' cohorts for each item contributing to LCC1; the results are shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Comparison Responses to LCC1 by Nationality

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia (<i>n</i> = 30)		China (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 1, 69)	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
02	mission understanding	1.77	0.90	2.33	0.94	6.250	0.015*
13	incentives aligned goals	3.53	1.17	4.10	0.90	5.267	0.025*
20	shared vision	3.53	1.17	4.55	0.75	19.634	0.000***
21	reaching mission continuously	3.60	1.13	4.45	0.96	11.522	0.001***

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

In LCC1, there were considerable differences between the Australian and Chinese perceptions of their understanding of mission, vision, values and goals of their organisations. For example, Item 02, 'Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?', $F(1, 69) = 6.250$, $p < .015$, there was a statistically significant difference in understanding of mission statements of their organisations between the two groups of participants. The mean values of the Australian respondents ($M = 1.77$) were relatively low but similar to that of the Chinese respondents ($M = 2.33$). The low means for both Australian and Chinese groups suggested that, for the Item 02 of LCC on shared mission understanding, respondents in this study had a weak sense of their organisations' directions.

There was a significant variation in perceptions with regards to the alignment of learning performance and organisational goals by the two sample groups. Item 13,

‘Academics’ learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals/The people and the learning that they do support our company’s goals’, $F(1, 68) = 5.267$, Australian participants ($M = 3.53$) reported less satisfaction to this item than Chinese respondents ($M = 4.10$); this difference was statistically significant ($p < .025$).

The data showed two ‘extremely’ significant differences existed between the two groups in their responses to Item 20, ‘My university/company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members’, $F(1, 69) = 19.634$, and Item 21, ‘My university/company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission’, $F(1, 69) = 11.522$. Australian respondents had the most negative statements about a shared vision that were generated within their organisations ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.17$, $p < .001$), and a commitment to organisational missions ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.13$, $p < .001$). The results of means for Australian respondents suggested, first, that the vision and values are not sufficiently shared; second, their organisations were not perceived as continuously reaching towards the mission. However, the results for the Chinese respondents on these two items (both $M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.75$, $p < .001$ and $M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.96$, $p < .001$ respectively) differed greatly from the Australian respondents’ results, and suggested more positive responses towards these items.

The documents relating LCC1 from the four workplace/institutional contexts can be found easily either from their websites or publications of annual reports, and were content analysed (Burns, 2000) for relevant themes and issues.

The main themes and expressions were reported in the following:

- “[AU] is committed to the creation, preservation, communication and application of knowledge, as well as excellence in all teaching, research and scholarly activities. Our research is integral to our identity and sense of purpose and we are ranked in the top 10 research universities in Australia”;

- “[CU] has held as its objective a well-balanced development in morality, intelligence, physical education and art. In accordance with its motto of ‘dedication to the public interests, acquisition of all-round capability and aspiration for daily progress’, the university has been dedicated to cultivating the students’ public virtues of patriotism and collectivism and developing their abilities to serve the country”;
- “[AB]’s purpose is ‘to see the [local] community prosper from our efforts’. [AB]’s vision is ‘to be the company most welcomed into people’s homes and businesses’. [AB] also has an agreed set of values: Customers; Teamwork; Safety and Health; Openness and Honesty; Community; Quality; and Leadership”;
- “[CB]’s vision is ‘to be the most respected Internet company’. [CB]’s mission is ‘to enhance people’s quality of life through Internet services’. [CB]’s values are Integrity; Proactive; Collaboration; and Innovation”.

It is likely also that the interviewee’s perceptions of their sense of learning community will be affected by their roles in those workplaces and the organisational cultures and contexts they have brought to their current workplace to fulfil their roles.

The following interview data thus provided a more detailed account of the four organisation cohorts’ perceptions regarding LCC1. These responses are provided to supply evidence for conclusions that may be made as to LCC1 in each of their own workplace contexts in which they are described in the analyses.

Most Chinese university interviewees were confident in clearly articulating their university mottos, for example:

The University of ..., one of China’s most prestigious universities, is neither the largest nor does it have the longest history in China, but it plays a very special and important role in higher education. Our university motto is clear, that is, “Dedication to Public Interests, Acquisition of All-round Capability, and Aspiration

for Progress with Each Passing Day”, made by the university founder ... (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

Australian university academic staff, however, were less sure of their institution’s mission statements, stating for example, “I have read it but I couldn’t quote it” (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10). Despite this, when participants were asked, does the mission statement [which was read out at interviews] resonate with or seem to express the aspects you see as central to what the university’s mission should be, positive comments were provided, for example:

Basically yes. I think that the mission, the mission statement of the university is what the university should be aiming for, so I think in terms of its contents and its focus and thrust is I think what we should aim for, yes (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

Both Australian and Chinese Business participants also positively commented on a shared mission, vision, values and goals. For example, one Chinese business participant particularly reported that, “there is a clear notion that it is going to become one of the most respected Internet enterprises” (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10). Another participant, who was asked to describe the mission statement, stated that:

Everybody understands what the vision is, and what the mission is. Our division understands, Customer Service understands, our Instant Messaging Service understands. Yes, I think everybody in our business clearly knows that our vision is to be the most respected Internet company, and our mission is to enhance people's quality of life through Internet services (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

This Chinese Business participant was further asked whether or not these reported mission and vision statements resonated with their company’s values and goals. Comments such as the following were typical of those who demonstrated an understanding of what their mission statements were, and what they were committed to:

Well, I think because in the last few years our company has developed very quickly, its responsibility is also getting heavier while we become stronger. You know we have a great many customers, almost over a billion, so any management behaviour possibly will affect many users, and the thrust of the whole business. The sustained, rapid and sound development of the company can be ensured only if a company has obtained customers' respect and loyalty. That's what I understand, so we need to become the most respected company, and be responsible for our users (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

When the same question was posed to the Australian Business cohort some participants were able to clearly report their company's statement of mission, vision, values and goals. For example:

I can use the annual report to help with that. And we are quite clear with what our purpose is – to serve the ... community and prosper from our efforts. Everyone is aligned with our services (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06).

The participant also described a close alignment that existed between the above stated mission/vision and the growing understanding of the company's purpose as developed by their staff.

I think in terms of the comments that I made there, everyone is aligned behind that ... because we have a common purpose. Everyone in the company understands that we are here to deliver our essential service, electricity ... the purpose was something developed with the staff. So all the staff agreed that this was the purpose, and the bit about being the [local] company most welcome in people's homes and businesses. That's saying something about how we do our work. So people should be proud to work for the company and therefore, whatever we do, we should be welcoming, so it says the type of company we are (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06).

However, not all participants interpreted their organisation's mission and vision statements as clearly as they were intended to convey meaning. The results

revealed some ambiguity in the understanding of the University mission statements, which some participants rephrased or reworded to make sense in their own understanding. For example, one Chinese University participant reported somewhat speculatively that, “I guess [sic] our mission is to provide quality education for both undergraduate and post-graduate students” (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9). Another participant commented that, “I don’t know... I may have seen a document, but I don’t think I’ve ever taken much notice of it” (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9).

When describing the mission of the Chinese University, one academic staff first explained the role of a mission statement, as follows:

If we come back to principles, what is the purpose of the mission? The literature has different views on the purpose of the mission. It should have some unifying concept, and it should at least imply a direction. That is all the mission has to do. And so people feel part of something, which is the unifying aspect, and they might have an idea of the broad objectives, which is the direction. I think it is easy to get too involved with words (F1, UNI, CN, 4, 18/09).

He also went on to report that different University cohorts may perceive the rhetoric of the mission differently depending on their roles as well as their more specific faculty or school’s focus:

But you can see that there are clearly some key differences between the University’s broad mission and the Faculty of ...’s mission. The university mission could have been seen as something that came out of the very long university tradition. The Faculty of ... has a narrower scope which makes sense because it is just a part of the university, but it is narrower again, and I think the Faculty recognises that it exists only because we produce graduates for businesses. There are very small proportions who are here to work for the beauty of the mission and vision, and therefore more abstract notions in terms of values.

Whilst they are not unimportant they are subsidiary to why the Faculty of ... exists. (F1, UNI, CN, 4, 18/09).

Data drawn from the interviews suggested that most Australian academic staff were acutely conscious that their knowledge of mission and vision statements was equivocal, ambiguous, or otherwise vague. One Australian academic staff reported that he lacked knowledge of the detail of the University's mission and vision statement, and reflected on his own experiences to interpret what the university statement is about:

I have never read it. Yes, that's why I said it is not clear. I mean I have my own interpretation of what the university is about, advancing learning in society, and advancing research. And also hopefully some form of engagement within the community. I am sure our mission statement relates to that (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

Another Australian University participant supported the fact that the lack of formal shared understanding of what their University's mission and vision statements were about, made them decide to develop their own interpretation:

Not really, no, we were talking about this the other day, that they've just done a major survey in which staff identified that they had an idea about the vision and mission of the university, but there wasn't actually a formal understanding of what that was. I suppose we assume that the mission of the uni would be to develop knowledge and to extend education; to pass that knowledge on. So there is sort of a two-stage process at the universities: the first part is to develop the knowledge; and the second part is to pass it on (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

The participant also attempted to clarify the difference between the formal University mission to foster a learning community, and a more prevalent, informal learning community that existed in his workplace by reporting the following:

I think the uni has a formal mission, and I think there's a formal policy where they're trying to make the hallmarks of a learning community with things like CALT [Centre for the Advancement of Learning & Teaching] and Teaching Matters, conferences and those sorts of things, so we're learning and doing [for research]. With research, they do it with things like Rising Stars [for research] and things like that, these are very formalised processes, which some people are going to take advantage of, because they offer them opportunities for career advancement, better funding and better research opportunities. But they are never going to get full scale buy-in to things that are forced upon people. It needs to be organic, something that staff themselves really drive. Again, there is a formal mission and formal processes that sit in conjunction with an informal mission and an informal learning community. I think the informal is probably bigger, and probably does a better job, because it is informal. People are there because of their own free will, as opposed to a forced system where you have a university saying, 'we'll have this senate for this, and we'll force people down this road and get them to do that' (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

In an attempt to support his colleagues, another Australian University academic staff considered and practised his own mission rather than the University's stated mission:

I don't take much notice of those localised rules and all sorts of things. I take my own mission I guess into those equations. My definition of those things is that I have been involved in educating people for the professions for over 50 years. I am concerned with mastery of particular topics, rather than just competence or passing an exam. So I guess my expectations of the learning experiences, or learning community, is by the time I get people, they should have reached a reasonable level of competence. By the time I have finished with them, they should have mastery of aspects of those things (M4, UNI, AU, 4, 14/10).

Unlike the Chinese cohort, most Australian University respondents reported substantial concerns or had unclear understandings of their university statements in its tangible outcome. For example, one Australian academic staff, in responding to the intention of the mission and vision of the Australian University presented in its statement, predicted the outcomes would not be forthcoming, and expressed the concern that managerialism undermines the trust and confidence in the results:

Whilst I have no doubt that the intention of this University is to meet its mission and vision. I'm not convinced that the outcomes are being met because of an increasing managerialism (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

The outcomes were likely to be achieved but with considerable doubt. The interviews with Australian University respondents also revealed a gap between their perceptions and what their University's mission statements set out to do, as was further evidenced in the following:

I am always a little bit worried about those things. I agree with all of the sentiments that are expressed but... do the people making those statements understand the demands that are involved and the resources required to do those things. Or do they have lower expectations than I do about what in fact those things mean. They are all terms that are very difficult to handle (M4, UNI, AU, 4, 14/10).

The analysis of LCC2 – Commitment to Continuous improvement, was further addressed by five contributing items in the survey-questionnaires, and Table 4.8 showed there was noticeable variation of responses within the two national groups, with all Australian respondents more critical and less satisfied with their organisations in terms of LCC2 than were Chinese respondents. The means for Australian respondents ranged from 2.47 to 3.90; whereas Chinese respondents were more positive than the Australian group ($M = 3.40$ to 4.80).

Table 4.8

Comparison Responses to LCC2 by Nationality

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia (<i>n</i> = 30)		China (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 1, 69)	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
04	learning culture	2.47	1.14	3.40	0.87	15.141	0.000***
12	goals to growth	3.37	1.30	4.60	0.56	29.277	0.000***
15	ongoing learning	3.90	1.01	4.45	0.75	6.969	0.015*
22	engaged ongoing improvement	3.53	1.07	4.80	0.46	44.673	0.000***
33	commitment is identity	3.70	1.02	4.72	0.45	31.998	0.000***

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Of these 5 items, Item 15 asked as to general perceptions concerning learning and the extent that learning is taken for granted as ‘an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge’, $F(1, 69) = 6.969$. The means were relatively similar between Australian ($M = 3.90$) and Chinese respondents ($M = 4.45$). Although a statistically significant difference was observed ($p < .015$), the values of the mean differences were much smaller than the values of others in four out of five contributing items from the analysis of LCC2 (see Table 4.8), suggesting that both Australian and Chinese respondents were generally in agreement with the proposition.

The quantitative data also showed that there were ‘extremely’ statistically significant different perceptions between Australian and Chinese respondents, when they were asked in the context of their respective work places. For example, Item 04, ‘To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?’, $F(1, 69) = 15.141$, $p < .001$, the mean value of the Australian respondents ($M = 2.47$) were statistically significant lower than that of

Chinese respondents ($M = 3.40$), suggesting that learning was not part of a culture that can be easily identified in Australian organisations, whereas participants in Chinese organisations made the more favourable judgements. Item 12, ‘My university/company is a learning community where goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness’, $F(1, 69) = 6.969$, $p < .001$. The mean from the Australian respondents was 3.37, dropping into the neutral range, which suggests that they were ambivalent about this claim, whereas there was extensive acceptance among the Chinese respondents ($M = 4.60$).

The results of the ANOVA analysis on Item 22, whether or not their organisations were ‘engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement’, $F(1, 69) = 44.673$, also showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups ($p < .001$). The Chinese respondents, who indicated a remarkable agreement with this statement, had a much higher mean score ($M = 4.80$) compared to the Australian respondents ($M = 3.53$).

Similarly, Item 33, “I agree that commitment is part of our university/company identity as a community”, $F(1, 69) = 31.998$, $p < .001$, Chinese respondents reported higher positive mean scores ($M = 4.72$), whereas the perceptions of Australian respondents appeared to be closer to neutral ($M = 3.70$), suggesting that Australian institutions had not made clear their commitments to be part of their organisation’s identity.

Interviewees also highlighted how they perceived their organisations and continually made adjustments to their commitments. Most comments from both Australian and Chinese organisations were appropriately reflected in the questionnaire response. Both Chinese University and Business participants supported the commitment to continuous improvement. As one Chinese academic staff reported:

As academic staff in the University of ..., I believe everyone strives to inherit the spirit of our university’s motto. The so-called ‘Aspiration for Progress with

Each Passing Day' [the University motto] means not only each person needs to be receptive to new developments but also to be the proposer of the new development; not only to be in time for the future, but also to be on the cutting edge of the times. I think that the University of ... has never retreated from our position of upholding the principles for progress (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

The Chinese academic staff reported that, from his perspective, all of the university employees were committed to ongoing development by adhering to its motto, 'Aspiration for Progress with Each Passing Day'. He went on to portray the changes he had witnessed:

The Innovation Fund has developed to support and encourage research and innovation. We have creatively advertised 100 vacancies to globally recruit chair professors, and deans of colleges and schools. Our School of ... also has cooperated with a number of world class universities across the world. I have been working [in this university] for 20 years, I can see that there are a lot of changes like these happening (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

Interviewees were asked directly about their perceptions of whether or not there are processes or practices that demonstrate a commitment to the cycle of continuous improvement. This was intended to reflect explicitly on LCC2 from each of their organisations. A Chinese academic staff continued:

In the Faculty, there are formal processes of reviewing, for instance course reviews, that have to be done every two years, where you have to explain the changes and developments that have occurred within those courses. [It is the] same kind of thing with research performance. We have to regularly report research developments and grants and there are supporting places for staff to develop and grow those things (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

Another Chinese University respondent elaborated on his university's structure where there was a division that had responsibility for organisational strategic direction and ongoing development:

We have a specialised department, the Strategic Development and Research Office, to ensure the ongoing development of quality of the educational process. Its main functions are to undertake and promote research, to revise our university strategic plan, and to provide quality of education and its operational parameters for promoting university reform and development (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

Another Chinese University respondent also clearly indicated their understanding of the link between the university commitment and mission in response to the growing social development needs:

A commitment to society and persistent self-improvement represents the university's mission. Anyone from the University of ... would have not only high profile expertise and knowledge but also the spirit to serve the people and society with the knowledge acquired from the University of ... (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9).

The need for the University to have continuous improvement is, to some extent, a reflection of social development and the consequences of changes in the social environment, as the Chinese University respondent commented:

I think the University plays a very important role in carrying out a number of big commissioned projects and establishing strategic business partnerships, like the cooperation with Tianjin Coca-Cola Beverages Company to establish an R & D Centre. So I think the ongoing development of the University of ... is closely related with Tianjin from different angles. Especially in the coming years, with the expansion of the TBNA (Tianjin Binhai New Area). The University is trying to seize all opportunities to accelerate its growth and continue its development, and enhance its

relationship with various circles in the society (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9).

The above comment suggested that the commitment to ongoing improvement was closely aligned with the university's mission, which addresses social progress. This was echoed also by another Chinese University colleague who gave an example of how the practices were implemented to contribute to the university's ongoing development:

This question is concerned with the development of the University. In recent years, there are many relationships between the University of ... or research institutes within the university and businesses working on some particular research cooperation... We have worked very closely with some business leaders in satisfying their human resource needs... a joint cooperation of five large-scale enterprises and the University of ... in the field of logistics has been launched. This required full cooperation and includes: our university providing relevant staff for consulting support, those enterprises giving specialized reports to our students, the university selecting elite staff for professional training, arranging students for inspection, and the university dispatching and training first-class professional and technical personnel for those enterprises (F1, UNI, CN, 4, 18/09).

In describing the cooperation between the Chinese University and the Businesses, the Chinese academic staff also saw this cooperative process as a learning process, which directly linked with the University goal:

For the University, it is a process of gradual learning; not just to learn how we continue development in itself, but also to find the way in which everyone can contribute to continuous improvement. In that way our goal, to foster human capital to help the development needs of our society, can be achieved (F1, UNI, CN, 4, 18/09).

On the other hand, Australian University respondents were not convinced that there was some level of debate regarding 'an ongoing cycle of continuous

improvement' within the academic faculty. Feedback from one Australian University respondent summarised the general impression of most:

That's an interesting question. I am most probably a bit of a critic, because my philosophy on education and that of others is maybe a little mismatched sometimes. But I think there's too much bureaucracy, I mean that the rhetoric of that statement is fine until it meets the bureaucracy and the bureaucracy is what stops the University from being able to be small and nimble to go about... you know, faculty saying 'let's do this' (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The Australian University respondent also acknowledged that changes for continuous improvement are required, though without confidence that changes would be understood and welcomed by all university stakeholders. He described it in the following way:

There are limitations or parameters or boundaries they get put around, the way in which that stakeholders' engagement might actually happen, which might hold back from genuinely wanting to... I mean I think the real challenge we have is that we could always improve. We could always live up to the rhetoric of those statements. But it would entail change. Some people like change, some people don't like change. Unfortunately people who like change, myself included, we are always in the minority. There are more people in the University who want things to stay the same than there are people who want it to change (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

Here, commitment to continuous improvement was perceived as a difficult process to manage effectively. This was supported by another Australian University colleague who reported an over-centralised management system:

I think that in some aspects, that is the intention of the university, yes. However, it's being continually centralised. In another words, the autonomy of the Faculties and Schools continually is being absorbed into the central administration of the university, so

whilst I have no doubt that the intention of this university is to meet its mission and vision. I'm not convinced that the outcomes are being met because of an increasing managerialism ... we are now adopting a policy of that, and therefore the intention is good, but I am not sure it is never going to come to anything (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

Another Australian academic staff reported that, despite his acknowledgement that there were processes in place to demonstrate a commitment to continuous development in this University, processes that need to bring about change were a concern:

I think the University does, yes; as a learning institute, you're always trying to improve. [However], people might be a little bit pessimistic about that, you always hear people in the hallway grumbling about 'things don't change, we're not doing this well or we're not doing that well'. I think it reflects the general concern that people have and the desire to do things better, and we're always pushing that boundary of how to improve. There are processes in place; if you look within our School, in terms of performance management, there is an annual cycle of feedback where you demonstrate to the Head of School what you've done in the previous year, you look at your SETL scores you use that information and formal/informal feedback you receive from students; you look at the results and then try to build on that. You can't keep doing the same things year-in year-out (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

The Australian University respondent also articulated the need to begin a process of change and put more emphasis on the outcome rather than on the process. He continued:

The University is constantly trying new things. At the moment they are in the process of trying things like flexible delivery, moving more towards online delivery of materials ... The Uni does think about these things, and whether its fully articulated, and everyone within the University believes in those

values or believes in that process of change and growth and development ... I think there are processes, but they probably do break down. A lot of emphasis is put on the process, and not so much the outcome ... People lower down in the university hierarchy would tend to say they're only doing that to tick the box, and because of that, they don't value it or see it as a meaningful process. There are 3-5 yearly reviews of each faculty, to see where they are in relation to what is expected of its community and the knowledge and learning at that particular time. There are processes there, but there is more emphasis on the process, and 'ticking the box', than there is on actually what comes out of that process (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

Responses from the Chinese Business interviewees also supported the view that 'commitment to continuous improvement' was important for the organisation. One typical supportive response was:

I think the evolution of our company is like a procedure of promoting innovation. More than 60 percent of our staff in the company are R&D people. Last year, we opened research centres in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen focusing on core technologies and R&D that would support the growth of our organisation (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

Another employee from the Chinese Business also illustrated her personal reflection on her own continuous improvement as follows:

Actually, in our company, there is a professional development system for each of our employees. Within this development system, each employee has a job plan managed by their supervisors. Our supervisor is responsible for conducting and examining the evaluation of our performance review at every half year. That means I have to report what I have done and what I have learnt over the last few months. The results of my performance review will be sent to me. If I get less than satisfactory results, our supervisor will discuss with me what the problem is, and how to improve, and ensure meet my job plan. But if I get

satisfactory results, then a re-defined job objective will be discussed, and I have to be ready for another round of evaluation. It really pushes me to ask for help from our training program sometimes, but keeps me on a continuous learning (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10).

The following quotation from an Australian Business respondent also reported that there was a continuous improvement in a business sense:

There are a lot of examples of that around the business. Umm...for instance, we have projects going on in our distribution business umm to try and improve productivity so workgroups meet and talk about their work umm to try and find better ways for doing it sometimes we take measurements and then maybe write a business case for new technology uh...business case would get implemented and then we measure the performance and then go around the loop again. So we have got many examples of that, where we are trying to improve our performance (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06).

In addressing LCC3, respondents in both the survey-questionnaire and the interviews continued to report their perceptions in response to Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry between Australian and Chinese workplace environments. The results of the survey-questionnaire are given in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Comparison Responses to LCC3 by Nationality

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia (<i>n</i> = 30)		China (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 1, 69)	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
03	multi-culture	2.30	0.92	2.58	0.59	2.315	0.133
05	entrance	2.56	1.01	3.73	0.64	33.604	0.000***
06	competitive	2.62	1.02	3.43	0.84	12.873	0.001***
07	motivation	2.70	1.18	3.73	0.60	22.565	0.000***

Table 4.9

Comparison Responses to LCC3 by Nationality (Continued)

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia (<i>n</i> = 30)		China (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 1, 69)	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
29	be encouraged to work	3.43	1.22	4.13	1.02	6.660	0.015*
30	be encouraged to learn	3.47	1.11	4.22	1.03	8.770	0.004**
31	helped others related to work	4.03	0.90	4.55	0.71	7.259	0.009**
32	helped others non-related work	4.03	0.89	4.50	0.82	5.184	0.026*
34	trust and respect colleagues	3.83	0.83	4.50	0.85	10.756	0.002**
35	caring environment	3.13	1.21	4.30	1.01	20.377	0.000**

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.9 shows that the overall mean values from the Chinese respondents were greater than that of Australian respondents; suggesting that Chinese participants were more optimistic about a collaborative culture and collective inquiry than Australian participants.

Interestingly, Item 03, ‘In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?’, $F(1, 69) = 2.315$, the Australian data reported a less multi-cultural or multi-ethnic working environment ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.92$) than Chinese data ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.59$); this difference was not significant ($p < .133$).

Among other contributing items, and despite great variation in the perceptions of the LCC3 items were found, most were statistically significant different but yet in the same agreement range. For example, Item 16, all Australian and Chinese

participants showed positive attitudes towards the claim that ‘the ways in which staff members work and learn together are crucial to the development of their institutions’. There was a statistically significant result but it was borderline in the mean value, $F(1, 67) = 5.898, p < .015, M = 4.10$ and 4.58 , respectively; or Item 31, ‘I have helped others to solve issues related to our work’, $F(1, 69) = 7.259, p < .009$, the mean values for Australian and Chinese responses were 4.03 and 4.55 , respectively.

On the other hand, particular attention has to be drawn to the values of means which represent distinct levels of agreement on collaborative and cooperative learning between Australian and Chinese responses. For example, Item 06, ‘Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff? / Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?’, $F(1, 68) = 12.873, p < .001$, respondents in Australia reported a relatively lower mean ($M = 2.62$) than respondents in China ($M = 3.43$), suggesting that noncompetitive learning environments were supported by Australian respondents, whereas Chinese institutions treated learning as both competitive and collaborative.

Positive responses were found in the interview data which supported the numerical results of the LCC3 items and the responses reflected the importance of interaction and the benefits of collaborative efforts.

Chinese academics reported that collaboration and cooperation had been developed across different Schools and Faculties to benefit them and assist them to accomplish their goals. One academic staff noted:

When we produced our projects, we cooperated with other people from different backgrounds in different Schools ... we were able to consider other people in other Schools as resources. So in recent years, we considered different disciplines, and not just focus on economics and higher education, but networked with others including Chemistry. We have tapped into

people with different talents and different knowledge endeavouring to collaborate around common goals (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

The positive perception of collaboration was supported also by colleagues not only in terms of broad workplace collaborative opportunities, but also through individuals sharing with each other to further their own research:

In our institute, we periodically organised seminars, conferences, a series of public lectures and exchange programs. Some important conferences that were held last year were focused on very wide and interdisciplinary research areas. I think we not only kept track of all the new developments in other research areas, but also gained a lot of benefits and valuable experiences from such academic pursuits. There was ample evidence available that verified, draw on the experiences of other equivalent research areas, stimulated and affected the development of our own research area (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

Australian University participants also were acutely aware that joint efforts were more than just two or three people who simply worked together. For example, one academic staff described his understanding that a jointly collaborative effort assisted them to improve their own research output:

I think also through research ... I find joint research and publications teaches me more than doing it singly ... because I pursue something myself ... and only looking through my links. So if there are two people or three doing it, I think that gives each of us a broader perspective, I think that contributes to the learning community (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

The development of a sense of learning community was perceived through individual research efforts in coordination with other colleagues in their workplace community. Small teams or regular meetings, discussions and information sharing were the results of collaborative attributes and seemed to reflect the desire to expand their sense of learning community within the

university contexts. For example, another Australian academic staff member reported:

Yes, we certainly work as a team; I think every unit that we offer as a School is team taught. There are a number of people involved: there is a team of 10 people involved in delivering international marketing. We talk on a daily basis at unit level, about student learning, what they are exposed to, whether they are thinking and learning about their experiences. As a School we have regular meetings around teaching and learning. A large part of what we talk about are issues around teaching and research, so there is a large amount of discussion about those sorts of things amongst colleagues (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

Whilst there was a general perception among both Australian and Chinese University participants that sharing knowledge and collaboration with others would be beneficial, a few Chinese and Australian academic staff provided information that there was a lack of workplace encouragement for being involved. For example, a Chinese academic staff member reported:

I knew nothing at all when I first came here ... People I worked with haven't been really encouraging. It was a difficult time as everything for me was new. I felt I was lack of inspiration to work, and just did what my supervisor asked me to do. Now I have been here long enough to know who is who, and what you need to do (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9).

This respondent indicated there was little opportunity to work with others. An Australian academic staff member also described different levels of sharing ideas, and viewed sharing information across disciplines as not providing valuable sources of new ideas. When he was asked whether there had been opportunities to communicate and discuss ideas with colleagues, he commented:

More so at the School level, so we're swapping ideas with how we are assessing our students or how to improve attendance in lectures or tutorials and techniques to improve that, or how to make a certain

section more interesting, often bouncing ideas off one another. Less so at a Faculty level, the disciplines in Business are really quite different and generally I just find their approach to teaching something ... well they are just two totally different things and a lot of their approaches won't work for the type of material that we teach. Someone's going to pick up the odd very very small thing but um ... and I've been to things like Teaching Matters the teaching conference before and um, every now and then I will pick something very small that will be useful, but I haven't been going again recently because I have just been too busy (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10).

The busy workload was perceived also as a reason for losing touch with what might be gained from the benefit of collaboration. Another Australian academic staff member also reported that there was little collaboration or discussion in his workplace.

With my teaching, No. I have no colleagues I actively discuss teaching with in my School or Faculty. I sometimes upset people because I am a little bit too ambitious and too keen to put the students' voice first. Maybe I have alienated the potential to have other collegial discussions with some of my colleagues. So I have less discussions and conversations with people inside my Faculty. I still have conversations, but they tend not to happen inside my Faculty (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

Both Australian and Chinese Business cohorts tended to be more engaged in collaboration. When one Australian respondent was asked if interaction had been extensive enough or discussion has been focused on work issues with their colleagues in their daily work, the answer was:

Yes. You build a network of community people that you can rely on and you can communicate with and you become a focus point for them. You have knowledge and experiences they start to respect. And that is earned throughout the company. I have gone into this new role taking a lot of these relationships with me. And not only are they internal relationships

they are relationships I have established with, say, regulators outside of the organisation like the Workplace Standards people who can have a big influence on what is happening internally. You do not get on by sitting in the corner not having relationships. Where you are going to get your information to put things together and understand the concepts of what you want me to do (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

The data showed that the Australian Business participants believed that their company, as an example of a knowledge-sharing learning community in a collaborative context, assisted employees to develop better relationships with their colleagues for their joint work in their work contexts. Chinese Business cohorts also found benefits in collaborative learning, and suggested that knowledge resided in each individual, with whom they learned and in turn supported them to achieve the common goals. As one Chinese academic staff described:

I have learnt a lot about the use of some of our software, systems and designing flow. In our studio, software development could not be seen as a direct outcome, as there are many variables. Too many things could happen that could prevent an intended program from the desired effect. Because problems of changing demand, updating in technologies, and movement of personnel, that sort of thing. So the experiences that I learned from most were how to communicate with different people, and I also learned that everyone in your team is important to achieve the project's objectives (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

Another Chinese Business participant described the significance of collaboration with others as follows:

The most important thing is how to better cooperate with our colleagues to be able to get together, and to reach agreements or understandings about what we take for granted, what we can do to provide the best value for our customers (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10).

However, there were also a few business respondents whose answers implied that they might be somewhat uncomfortable with the collective inquiry approach and for them to take an active role in developing knowledge sharing. As one Chinese respondent commented, “Some people do not like to pour out, or just do not like being involved in talking” (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10). The interview data indicated that whilst a collaborative culture was perceived as essential to organisational learning, it was clear that a lack of sufficient incentive to motivate participation in collective knowledge sharing would hinder the operation of a learning community.

She also found changes in the processes in the Business and described the influence of joint collaboration and information sharing of her department with others where the relationships appear to be competitive:

As I said, our department – as other departments – was initially developed as an open team in nature. But now we call it a studio and it tends to be very individual. Now we have Project Managers, and an Art Designer, Chief Director, Chief System Programmer, etc. Before this new system was introduced, it was very much like a resource sharing across the business. All personnel were allowed to walk in and out of different teams, so you may be involved in the work they were doing to help a collaborative effort, or you may learn something from your colleagues at different departments. Our team might even move to contribute to other teams – joining their projects. This can result in a significant increase in productivity you know, and we also learned a great deal from each other’s cooperation and expertise. However, as the system has been transformed at the end of last year for commissioning, by now our system is stable but relatively isolated. It is pretty difficult to go to other teams as we did before. Every studio is just like each small individual business. The relationship among each studio is competitive. It is not easy to learn from other studios, and to co-operate with others even harder. (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10).

In the analysis of LCC4, the overall means of attitudes towards ‘Supportive and Shared Leadership’ ranged from negative values to positive values depending on the question items – where a set of question statements were presented in a positive orientation, and some items were stated negatively to explore perceptions from a different perspectives.

As seen in Table 4.10, the low mean of the Australian respondents ($M = 1.59$) for Item 09, $F(1, 67) = 1.133$, $p < .291$, was not statistically significant different from that of Chinese respondents ($M = 1.80$). Also there were the same means for Item 10, $F(1, 67) = 0.020$, $M = 1.68$, $p < .986$, suggesting that both Australian and Chinese respondents reported either not being cowed by figures of authority, or, dealing with externally imposed discipline.

Table 4.10

Comparison Responses to LCC4 by Nationality

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia ($n = 30$)		China ($n = 40$)		F ($df = 1, 68$)	p
		M	SD	M	SD		
09	figures of authority	1.59	0.50	1.80	0.99	1.255	0.291
10	bossed around	1.72	0.46	2.33	0.97	9.550	0.003**
11	external-discipline	1.68	0.67	1.68	0.89	0.020	0.986
14	goals establishment	3.83	1.18	3.13	1.08	7.054	0.012*
17	supportive leaders	3.07	1.07	4.40	0.90	31.445	0.000***
18	natural learning supported	3.70	0.84	4.28	1.11	5.660	0.020*
19	future preparation	3.59	1.21	4.43	0.87	11.213	0.001**
36	belonging	2.90	1.06	4.33	0.86	37.393	0.000***
39	leaders support learning	3.00	1.20	4.25	0.95	21.525	0.000***

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Australian respondents reported significantly less agreement on Item 14, $F(1, 68) = 7.054, p < .012$, ‘The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board/My company’s goals should be established by the governing body of the company’, than Chinese respondents. The mean values were 3.83 and 3.13, respectively. In addition, learning was significantly taken for granted as ‘a natural process and my university/company provides opportunities to facilitate it’, Item 18, by Chinese institutions, $F(1, 68) = 5.660, M = 4.28, p < .020$, compared to Australian institutions ($M = 3.70$).

Among the 9 contributing items to LCC4, three items showed highly statistically significant difference; Item 36, all of the Australian and Chinese respondents reported that their work community reduced their feelings of isolation and helped them come to terms with negative emotions, $F(1, 69) = 37.393$. However, Australian respondents were less supportive of this assertion ($M = 2.90, SD = 1.06$) than the Chinese respondents ($M = 4.33$); this difference was significant at $p < .001$. In addition, the data also suggested that the Chinese respondents who reported supportive leadership perceptions about their gain in individual repertoire of knowledge – Item 17, $F(1, 68) = 31.445, M = 4.40, p < .001$, were those who strongly asserted that their institutions had fostered a learning community and the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members – Item 39, $F(1, 68) = 21.525, M = 4.25, p < .001$. On the other hand, those Australian respondents who tended to be less positive towards their supportive leader in individual knowledge gain ($M = 3.07$) were those who felt their institutions on supportive learning needed improvement ($M = 3.00$).

The respondents’ perceptions from the two Australian and two Chinese organisations on LCC4 were further compared cross-culturally by interview data, adding a contextual interdisciplinary outlook between education and business organisations within the analysis. Given the results obtained from the above data analysis from the survey-questionnaires, some of the following interview data

draw strikingly different pictures about LCC4 from the data in the survey-questionnaires.

Both Australian and Chinese Business cohorts tended to comment more positively on their organisational management and leadership at their respective workplaces. However, for those in university academic staff positions both Australian and Chinese cohorts voiced growing concern on the need for more shared authority and the desire for more supportive leadership.

Australian Business counterparts not only supported a centralised leadership and management system but also were aware that there was a need for consistency in their decision making in their departments. One Australian Business participant reported:

Yep, there certainly is my department ... has a centralised human resources function so even though we have 5 HR advisers which is the same as me ... the business, giving advice because we are centralised we are all working for the same department that ensures consistency of decision making. So if I have a situation where I may need to make a decision outside of what we would normally do I consult with these other four people, so that that decision is applied consistently across the business (F1, BUS, AU, 1, 15/06).

Another senior executive also reflected that their management were endeavouring to devolve decision making in a way that encouraged each employee to bring valuable insights to the decision making process. He reported:

Yeah ... um ... I think it's fair to say that we have a fairly uh... consensus culture, a sort of consultative culture so... in making decisions senior people would like to talk to their staff and get their staff ideas as to how to make a decision um ... and at the end of the day the leader is still accountable for making that decision. Um ... so I generally try and have a meeting with the key people and everyone gets to give their view and then hopefully their views align and the

decision is easy. Sometimes you might have some conflicts and you have to umm, make a call to do differently (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06).

Australian Business attempted to share more of the leadership, power or authority in the decision making process. The examples above demonstrated that consultation in the Australian Businesses in this study revolved around people's participation in the leaders' decision making process.

In the Chinese Business, the management and leadership were reported to proclaim an open-door policy to show their interest in having employees share their ideas. For example, one Chinese Business employee reported:

Well, the relationships are quite liberal. Our business boasted an open-door policy between managers and lower-level employees, which means the executives, at all levels, must keep an door open to ensure that anybody who has a question or suggestion can be proposed immediately to any management member (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

Employees' views were of interest and concern in the managerial or executive suite to ensure that individual issues and voices are welcomed to be heard. This participant went on to describe the ways management built their capacity for being genial. She described:

I think our key management personnel and other executives at all levels are more willing to take the initiative to seek to communicate with us. They are more familiar to us. I think some examples are things like that, our executives quite often show their faces at the annual end of year party, and even performed on the stage. Most of our senior business executives, such as CXO, including CEO, CFO, COO, etc., took time out at noon to have lunch with our general staff, on average once every two weeks. We called it Lunch Interaction Day (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

The respondent from the Chinese Business, who reported a positive response to the open-door policy, had developed a growing understanding that their managerial team had been genial and easily approachable.

Although the above stories indicated supportive leadership behaviours, there were concerns raised by Chinese Business respondents as to the level of trust their authorities in higher positions held in their employees. As one Chinese employee commented about her departmental supervisor:

She is working too hard and she looks so tired. She took care of everything we had done. We really appreciated her personal attention to detail, but how can so much work be done? We think sometime we should be given some trust about our work at least (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10).

If the above quotes from the Chinese Business participants can be seen as a constructive criticism of the trust between the managers and the employees, then the following comments made by Chinese University counterparts can be described as underlining discontent in response to perceived decision making challenges.

In the Chinese University, it was perceived that the Chinese national culture inhibited the Chinese academic staff in their decision making roles, which were dominated by existing centralised power structures and this lead to feelings of frustration. One Chinese academic staff reported the situation of power imbalance and the status quo relationship between the university management and its employees:

You know the issue that China has a long history of centralised power. The relationship between the university leaders and our staff still remains at the pattern of manager and managed level (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

A rigidly centralised hierarchical order between superiors and subordinates was reported. The Chinese academic staff continued:

As academic staff, we understand instinctively that the authority of the Secretary of the Party Committee or Vice Chancellor is sovereign. Underneath them are the Deans of the department, directors of educational administration and us academic staff are at the bottom (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

The Chinese academic staff viewed the shared leadership in the participation of decision making process very cynically, and commented:

In reality it's by no means easy to develop a sort of learning community where people involved are not seen as equal in this authoritarian organisational culture. There always been some sort of power over everything in China. I think it would be very hard to build any form of shared community, which would be quite different to one that has any imposed institutional discipline (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

In the Australian University, the academics also reported an authority-oriented discipline that is rooted in the tertiary education system, and some saw shared decision making as a challenge in their university workplaces. One academic staff reported the challenge in this way:

I think it is challenging because the University at the highest level, senior levels, have the roles and responsibilities for decisions they need to make. And the Faculty, I think probably is reactive, to the initiatives which are coming down. There may be initiatives coming up from the Faculty staff, which means the Head of School is sort of sandwiched in between staff coming down and staff that might be coming up. All of that I think makes it difficult for there to be a shared voice (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The Australian academic staff reported that attempts to create a shared voice in decision making processes could be a waste of effort between those staff who

have delegated authority and those who were given the opportunity to share in decision making. He expressed a concern that:

We just had a survey which [Deputy Vice-Chancellor's name] has done, that seems to have a lot of shared opinion going in to it, but how the voices are interpreted and how the voices gets reported, I am not sure (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The difficulty of shared voices was also highlighted by the change in Chinese decision making processes where the unequal nature of hierarchical relationships reinforced a historical authoritarian cultural value. As one Chinese academic staff reported:

One of the things we have been discussing with my colleagues and the School of Economics is the difficulty in the processes where Chinese higher education 20-30 years ago was based on a formalised hierarchical education system, it now managed by performance measurements ... It [the University] has become a business, it now is a business. They did command staff to participate in the decision making process, as they expected high performance. Therefore the [changed] processes imposed upon staff in the decision making are different, but what's also different are the stakes, as the stress in different power authority between superiors and inferiors is strong (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

This Chinese academic staff reported that the education system maintained a top-down authority hierarchy. He noted that there had been a change in the system and now shared decision making participation was officially proclaimed and this puts pressure on them to achieve a high performance level which, in turn, also raised the stakes for authority figures.

Interestingly, Australian University counterparts also noted the historical influence on universities as a business but described it as follows:

Because university is a business and about attracting students from the international market and providing them with an education. If you look at the philosophies, which surrounded education in the 1920's. That is a very different way I am thinking about education and what was the role of the scholars. Many scholars didn't get paid in the past. They were paid by the students who attended their class. If you weren't very good at what you did, or your subject area wasn't very well patronised, you didn't earn any money. There was a process of natural selection. Now we have a relatively strong unionised presence in our work forces (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

It would seem that the bureaucratic nature of the universities influences the capacity for employees to have shared voices. The Australian University academic staff perceived this issue to be an outgrowth of bureaucratic leadership management style which, in turn, reflected back upon LCC1 – shared vision, mission, values and goals and LCC2 – commitment to continuous improvement:

I think the bureaucracy makes it difficult for the shared voice. Because if there isn't a core, if there isn't a leadership that's to trying to improve things, if there is resistance to any form of leadership like that, it's very hard to have a shared voice. You've already got people on opposing sides, the people who want things to stay as they are and people who want things to change. And within the change side, there are different types of change. People want things to return to how they were 20 years ago. People want them to move ahead. I think within the change segment, it's quite splintered, and not everyone wants the same time to change. So that's because it's so fragmented, it made even harder for those people who achieve, you know, any changes. Shared voice, I think it is a difficult thing to achieve (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

Bureaucratism, which was perceived as part of Chinese cultural values, also played a significant role in the Chinese universities, as reported:

The current Chinese universities have become de facto government attached administration bureaucratic

apparatus, which are essentially like a government-owned businesses (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

He continued reporting that the attempt to undertake shared decision making processes was caught up in the bureaucracy of their university workplaces, through which they were placed in a subordinate position of being unable to validly engage in shared decision making:

Many meetings, plenty of meetings, most meetings in the University are just a bureaucratic formality. It was not up to us to decide anything. And I feel I spent more time in meetings than I do productively working (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

Participation in meetings appeared to be manipulated by the bureaucratic red tape with centralised decision making, and their participative behaviours were less likely to be considered as shared decision making roles by the University authorities. This was also the case in the Australian University, as one academic staff member focused on the levels where the decisions were made:

The University has moved from a predominantly academic system, where a lot of the decision making was devolved to staff, to now where we have an administrative system, with administrative Deans and administrative Heads of School, a lot of the decision making rests with those core people and it's up to them the degree in which they consult and discuss with staff about important issues (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

Australian academic staff reported insincere and condescending decision making gestures reflected in their working experiences as they became aware of decisions that had already made without being consulted:

If we don't like a decision that the University makes... they resist, or are resentful of someone – It sort of flies in the face of what an academic is supposed to beWe have a 'top-down' leadership system running, because we have moved to an administrative structure, not an academic structure, the Heads of School, and

Deans now don't have to consult if they don't want to, and I think you're starting to see increasingly a lack of consultation, or things are presented as consultation, but they're not really, they're actually telling you what's going to happen, and you're just sitting there listening, again, that creates resentment because as a community, people would have the right to discuss, and have an opinion, and vote on things. We haven't, since I've started as a full-time staff member, we've never voted on anything, therefore you're not really making a decision (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

The same perceptions also were evidenced by other Australian academic staff, for example:

They're largely more information gaining rather than decision making units so I thought well, if I am just getting new information I decided not to bother... I don't feel like we've got much sort of participation of saying anything beyond the Faculty (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10).

The negative comments suggest a view that University academics appear to indicate disagreement in relation to LCC4 – Supportive and Shared Leadership. The extent of dissatisfaction with LCC4 by the University academics differed substantially from the level expressed by the Business respondents.

In LCC5, the analysis of 'freedom of group membership' reported four statistically significant Items (see Table 4.11), among which, Item 08, 'Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?', $F(1, 68) = 14.308$, the lowest mean value was reported by Australian respondents ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.32$) indicating that they were less supportive of the proposition they were given freedom in learning and, in fact, they had less time to research than Chinese respondents ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.80$).

Table 4.11

Comparison Responses to LCC5 by Nationality

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia (<i>n</i> = 30)		China (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 1, 69)	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
08	freedom	2.25	1.32	3.23	0.80	14.308	0.000***
25	able to explore issues	3.87	1.01	4.50	0.72	9.452	0.003**
27	able to learn	3.93	0.87	4.28	0.93	2.437	0.123
28	able to think critically	4.07	0.87	4.45	0.78	3.743	0.057
37	relationships developing	3.77	0.97	4.60	0.67	18.003	0.000***
38	opportunities to discuss issues	3.83	1.00	4.10	1.08	1.124	0.293
40	innovative knowledge produced	3.77	0.77	4.45	0.68	15.435	0.000***

Note. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

The other three items where the differences between the two groups' means were statistically significant for the Australian respondents were Item 25, 'I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process', $F(1, 69) = 9.452$, $M = 3.87$; Item 37, 'I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues', $F(1, 69) = 18.003$, $M = 3.77$, and Item 40, 'Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university/business community are engaged', $F(1, 69) = 15.435$, $M = 3.77$. Chinese respondents appeared to support strongly their institutions on these propositions.

The qualitative interview data relating to LCC5 showed that some Business participants regarded freedom as freedom to participate in decisions, which reflected in responses to LCC4 in the survey-questionnaires. For example, one Chinese Business employee reported:

I think that all of us are given freedom to participate in the [project] meeting. I would share my experiences with my colleagues in the conference room if I felt something might be of benefit to our project (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

An Australian Business employee was also of the impression that freedom to offer input was the result of opened communication between the leaders and themselves:

In my group, there is ... uh ... I suppose I am not at the top level. So I can certainly have input and give comment to my manager about what I think we should do that's very open communication channels. I am allowed to say I think we should do this or we should do that, but I am not the ultimate decision maker, but I can certainly have as much input as I like (F1, BUS, AU, 1, 15/06).

Another Business respondent reported freedom as freedom to act in an autonomous way. He indicated that the degree of autonomy was dependent upon the role that employees have. The higher the positions you reached, the higher level of autonomy you received, and the more significant that role becomes:

In my previous position I had a fairly autonomous role. That was due to respect for my previous knowledge. And I got on with the job I did not go looking for a manager and saying, hey, what do I need to do. I was just get on with it. I will go and say to them, ok, this is what has happened, this is where we are with that, then there are maybe further things to come out. In this new role I am in, I have a lot of autonomy, because it raises me up a couple of bars. Because it is in a managing level. You need deliver and you need to get outcome out of this, there is a lot of autonomy. The thing you have to be careful of is external influences that I have to manage that could make the decision making a lot harder. As long as you are aware of that, you can manage that. The new role is given autonomy. In the old role, it was assumed autonomy. It was assumed that you had the skills and

abilities to do it. And this one it is given that we expect you to deliver (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

In the Chinese University, while there were not many academic staff who reported they had broad academic freedom, one academic staff acknowledged that opportunities were provided for professional autonomy in the development of their own research. Freedom was reflected in LCC3 when Chinese academic staff reported organising seminars, conferences, a series of lectures and other research activities. These activities existed in the context of collaborative and cooperative community contributed to develop professional autonomy. As one Chinese academic staff responded in the following way to LCC5:

...[By organising those research activities], you were able to listen to others, you were free to contribute your ideas with your colleagues, and also you were able to get support from your colleagues. There was a lot of freedom actually in discussions as they were very much teamwork jobs. Because we were looking for useful ideas, that always remained open to change things efficiently in practice...I think our colleagues in the University of ... were given a sort of degree of academic freedom in doing their own research. You were encouraged to present and publish your research works that kinds of things. That's my deepest experience in [university name], and I think that's our biggest difference with other universities as there is a bit more freedom than others (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09).

However, a number of academic staff from both Australian and Chinese Universities generally complained about the academic freedom issue. One Australian University academic staff indicated a concern about the lack of awareness of available academic freedom.

It is a point of frustration for me when I look at other people complaining about the conditions at the University of ..., because they actually have the same degree of freedom too, and just don't use it (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The Australian academic staff also commented on their involvement in deciding the broad strategies their department should take. He continued to report others' perceived lack of freedom indicating a difficulty in reaching a consensus:

Going back a few years, 2004 and 2005, I was exploiting this [academic] freedom to go off and do all sorts of different things, and it upset a lot of my colleagues that I questioned the Faculty and School of Management approach ... To be honest with you, I am amazed that a lot of other people don't grab hold of this freedom they actually have (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

A typical comment from a Chinese academic, however, indicated a more pragmatic perspective in terms of the lack of academic freedom. These comments were based on the potential threats of recrimination from higher authorities:

As I said, many regular meetings seem to be meaningless and formalistic. Those meetings were organised in ways to pull us together to listen. We are supposed to be given the right to say something. At least we'd be able to make some sort of suggestions to say that, oh, that seems not to be going to work. What I expected was that people would be talking about what's right, what the issues were, how are we going to deal with them and all sort of things. You'd be talking about your ideas, and hopefully all of us learn something about what you are thinking on how we going to improve things. But actually they don't, as they feared and wouldn't dare offend the higher level. That's the problem (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

The data suggested that the Chinese University system, historically, is more influenced by central government policies, and therefore more bureaucratic when it comes to leadership practices. This makes academic freedom more difficult to be achieved. Another Chinese academic staff emphasised the difficulty of exercising this freedom:

I think it would be very hard to build any form of community where members share knowledge and

participate freely based on equality, as it would be quite different to one that has any imposed institutional discipline (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9).

Another Australian University participant described his university as a formal learning community where “[the formal] process slows things down and reduces your ability to do things differently.” For example,

I think there’s a formal learning community ... the uni has tried to create a formal system, which I think most staff don’t respect that formal process, we tend to feel more comfortable with more informal processes. I think there is certainly an informal community, where, we, as colleagues, talk about issues that we feel need to be attended to. Staff, specifically at the ground level, prefer the informal processes, and I think they believe that some of the external or formal processes, like ... and that are forced upon them (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

The questions in LCC6 sought to identify whether or not proximity was a key factor in affecting the sense of learning community and if practitioners were mutually engaged to develop such a learning community. Some statistical differences were found among the survey responses to LCC6 (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Comparison Responses to LCC6 by Nationality

Item No	Contributing Item	Australia (<i>n</i> = 30)		China (<i>n</i> = 40)		<i>F</i> (<i>df</i> = 1, 69)	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
23	mutual interaction encouraged	3.90	0.80	4.75	0.49	29.866	0.000***
24	engagement encouraged	3.80	1.03	4.58	0.59	15.707	0.000***
26	cooperate in proximity	3.83	0.91	4.45	0.88	8.199	0.006**

Note. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

In Table 4.12, the mean value for Item 23, 'My university/company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues', $F(1, 69) = 29.866$, were relatively high for the total sample of both the Australian and the Chinese respondents, indicating that opportunities for mutual interaction were available to them ($M = 3.90$ and 4.75 , respectively). However, the p -value < 0.001 indicated that the results are significantly different. Furthermore, Chinese respondents reported much higher agreement in relation to sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others (Item 24, $M = 4.58$), and preferring to work with close colleagues to produce desired outcomes (Item 26, $M = 4.45$) than Australian respondents ($M = 3.80$ and 3.83 , respectively), with significant p values (< 0.001 and < 0.006 , respectively).

Participants were then asked in interviews to provide their perception on the issues of proximity and mutual engagement. Both Business respondents and University respondents acknowledged not only the role of close proximity that supported relationship building in their workplace, but also the link between proximity and mutual engagement.

One Chinese academic staff had recognised geographical/physical propinquity that mattered to their personal closeness, and reported that:

Some of our colleagues in our faculty from the same cities will come together to do something together naturally, because we are easier to talk to or get along with each other more than others, and I think we tend to be more understanding and trusting especially when doing things together, and you would call them when you are in a time of need (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/9).

The Chinese academics tended to develop positive relationships with those who were located in close geographical/physical proximity. The nature of the close relationships between individuals required geographical proximity for interaction, including that of localisation and geographical concentration within the organisation. The demonstration of a feeling of trust and dependence reflected

homogeneity, which also positively related to collaborative and cooperative behaviour. This was demonstrated, for example, by one Australian academic staff who commented on the significance of friendship as a vehicle in their collegial collaboration and knowledge development:

It assists if you like, greasing the way to make the wheels turn smoother. Umm, I certainly consult people with whom I'm friendly more than those whom I don't particularly like. That said, it is a professional organisation and therefore, umm liking or not liking someone would be no reason not to approach them or to supply them with any knowledge you have (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

Individuals who shared physical closeness with each other reported increased communication and collegiality. Another Australian University colleague looked back over many years and saw a change in the nature of friendship at universities:

It's really difficult to have everyone on the same page. It's not to say that there are not great scholars. There clearly are. But I think at work, those scholars work in a different environment than what scholars did 10 years ago. I think scholars 10 years ago had a lot of friends at the universities. I think that scholars now are, you know, quite isolated (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The Chinese Business cohort, however, commented on the extent of friendship relations and reported more supportive behaviour related to friendship within their workplace. Comments such as the following were typical:

I simply try to be encouraging, and let my colleagues in our team know that they are important, because it's how I'd want to be treated. I make myself the better person in most cases and get respected for it. I volunteer whenever I get a chance during my free time, and I believe the best relationship must be friendly. Because your attitude, beliefs and experiences will definitely affect your work and relationship with your colleagues (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

In her earlier response in LCC3, the Chinese Business respondent (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10) also discussed the need for personal relationship with her colleagues. She reported a sense of isolation within the organisation, as reflected in LCC6, where their departments were competitively positioned against other departments and therefore hindered the amount of information sharing.

An Australian Business respondent addressing the LCC3 issue of collaboratively sharing information described his reluctance to collaborate and share knowledge after he was no longer located close to his formal colleagues:

People I have got working around me at the moment have a bit ... there are a lot of people relying on my skills from groups I have left behind. They still want meetings with me as well. That's has make a very difficult for me. They want my information. It's quite difficult (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

Both Australian and Chinese University cohorts felt strongly a lack of physical proximity and support from their university, and believed that such missing, or lack of, support contributed to the difficulties of knowledge dissemination.

Chinese academic staff reported that conventional face-to-face interaction was challenged by increased technological linkage in which physical proximity may not be necessary, as one respondent reported:

I think it sometimes depends on personal characteristics, some people are willing to talk, or some people would like to read books. Especially now in the age of the Internet, people do not have to interact with each other face-to-face. But face-to-face interaction is much better than computer-based communication or other kinds. I recently had a physical conversation with a Maonan [Chinese ethnic minority] colleague and I think that kind of face-to-face communication was very necessary; because of something that we were talking and discussing about were outside the textbook. A more deep understanding we can get than if you talk online or send emails (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/9).

For Australian University academic staff this was also true as the Australian case study university has campuses in different locations, and the academic staff reported that they felt personal relationships were lessened even though there were technological advances. As reported by one academic staff, for example:

... we teach our class through an online system and don't get to know colleagues from [our other campus] ... there was a time when we had to get together, now we don't, so it doesn't happen. So I think the technological aspect has weakened the personal relationships across campus. I think the Faculty and Schools need to bring them [the meetings] back (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

This view was confirmed by a colleague who reported that the way in which business staff members relate to each other was being transformed by technology:

From my perspective, No. I don't see that. It's not something that's here at the moment I don't see that. As far as learning and sharing from and imparting information to other people, people have looked upon me as a mentor. Just imparting my skills that way. Coz of the knowledge base that I have built up over the years ... But as far as getting together, learning from different things there is a sharing information but it is more through the electronic media then it is by sitting down and talking to each other about the issues. There are some good things that are happening in that area (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

There was a change from the conventional information sharing of face-to-face work to dispersed virtual community settings where respondents function in a way that they were physically separated. The degree of proximity in personal relations was reported as a significant determinant to tie organisational members together and it can be influenced not only by technological progress, but also by the context in which the organisation operated. One Australian academic staff member described the relations and context in this way:

I don't work very closely with my colleagues in the School of ... or Faculty of ..., that's part of the reason for being here, just be away from... it's not just me and any personality issues. It's because entrepreneurship education isn't an extension of business education. It is a totally different approach to education, it's highly experiential and in a sense, being here, it's trying to make it clear but there is a disjunct between a more lecturer-centered way of doing things and more student-centered driven way of doing things. So there are several reasons, some legitimate and others not so legitimate reasons why I don't work closely with many of people I am actually employed with (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The missing sense of proximity or feeling of isolation was reported as not an issue of individual personality. Among Business employees, however, one Australian employee, when asked about the feelings of isolation, described geographic isolation as a concern:

Not in my area, but I think there may be in other areas. There is also the issue of geographic isolation because we have people based across the whole state. There might be pockets where there are one or two people employed at a remote location (F1, BUS, AU, 1, 15/06).

Overall, both Australian and Chinese Business cohorts expressed optimistic sentiments about the workplace context demonstrating the way in which individuals were bound together and were inspired by their colleagues and friends in intimate surroundings. One Chinese Business employee reported that they mutually respect each other.

Yes, I am fairly happy. I love our work place for its comfortable surroundings. And I love the people that I am working with. It's great working with people you know and for people you respect and who respect you (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

An Australian Business employee also responded more expansively to the feeling of engagement within the organisation by describing the effects on personal motivation and encouragement through a sense of community as family:

It does have good teamwork, it is more like a family type of Business. It does look after its people quite well. It has some of the best Human Resource components in looking after people. With sick leave, you get continuous sick leave ... that's cool. If you are sick, they will look after you ... say you are in a car accident, and broke you leg. And you spend so much time in hospital they will also try to help you get back to work quickly. So you are not just sitting at home being a pest to someone else. And you are around the people you are normally around every day (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

The respondent was motivated also by being well-respected for his knowledge and skills: "There you were respected for your skills and knowledge. You were seen very proficient in what we had knowledge of and what we were able to do" (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

However, if employees perceived themselves to be novices with less experience or knowledge, then they were likely to be less motivated by their surroundings. A Chinese Business respondent reported:

As I was just a newcomer, I didn't know anyone in this company personally. I sometimes saw my colleagues eating together every day, and hanging out after work occasionally. I was just feeling I have been excluded from them. When I come across some problems, I was ashamed to ask them. It is, after all, due to that we do not have that kind of close relationship (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10).

From the data, it appears that the extent of mutual engagement was perceived by respondents, who had gained the respect and the trust of others, through sharing their accumulated knowledge. On the other hand, there were also concerns raised

by respondents who reported a heightened sense of isolation or a feeling of being lonely.

The analysis of each of the above six LCCs contributed to the findings pertaining to the second sub-question of the Research Question 2, “Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions of learning community towards each of the developed criteria?” The data analysis indicated that those differences in the perceptions were perhaps due to the difference in culture in each country. However, the individual organisational workplace culture under which the learning took place also played a significant role in shaping practitioners’ own values, sense of learning community, and their engagement within it. These findings help address the third sub-question under the Research Question 2.

To what extent do the operationalised criteria fit stakeholders’ perceptions?

Although the Items in the survey-questionnaires discussed above have been grouped into six defined LCC and are derived from the existing literature, many of them are perceived in similar ways by practitioners. The analysis raised the question as to what the underlying factor structure of the stakeholders’ own perceptions of learning community research criteria is and how the stakeholders’ reports of learning community criteria make sense of literature. The result of criteria operationalised from the literature suggests a six-criteria structure as described in Table 2.2 (reported in Chapter 2).

In order to see the extent of stakeholders’ own perceptions on the inter-correlations of those six LCCs, and summarise their own perceptions using a smaller set of factors, 39 contributing items to the LCC were subjected to an exploratory principal axis factor (PAF) analysis using SPSS Version 18.

Prior to performing PAF, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of

0.3 and above. Table 4.13 showed substantial correlations between the variables (Items). The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) was 0.76, exceeding the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974) and the value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 1977.2$, $df = 741$, $p < .001$) supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix and indicating that correlations between Items were sufficiently large for PAF analysis.

Table 4.13

KMO and Bartlett Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measured	.763
Bartlett Test	
Approx. Chi-squared	1977.237
FD	741
Sig.	.000

In order to determine the number of factors to 'extract' or retain for the factor analysis, two techniques were used by examining all the eigenvalues that were one or greater than one, as well as the Scree plot of the eigenvalues. Using Kaiser's criterion (Kaiser, 1960), the analysis of PAF revealed the presence of nine factors with eigenvalue exceeding 1 (13.585, 3.912, 2.322, 2.02, 1.584, 1.432, 1.346, 1.102, 1.06), explaining 34.8 %, 10%, 6%, 5.2%, 4.1%, 3.7%, 3.5%, 2.8% and 2.7% of the variance, respectively. However, it was useful to compare the Scree plot visually to decide how many factors need to be considered. An inspection of the Scree plot (see Figure 5) revealed a quite clear break between the fourth and fifth factors. The curve descended steeply and then began to flatten out at about the fifth factor. Consequently, using Catell's (1966) Scree Test, a final decision was made to extract four factors for further investigation as Factors 1, 2, 3 and 4 capture much more of the variance than the remaining factors.

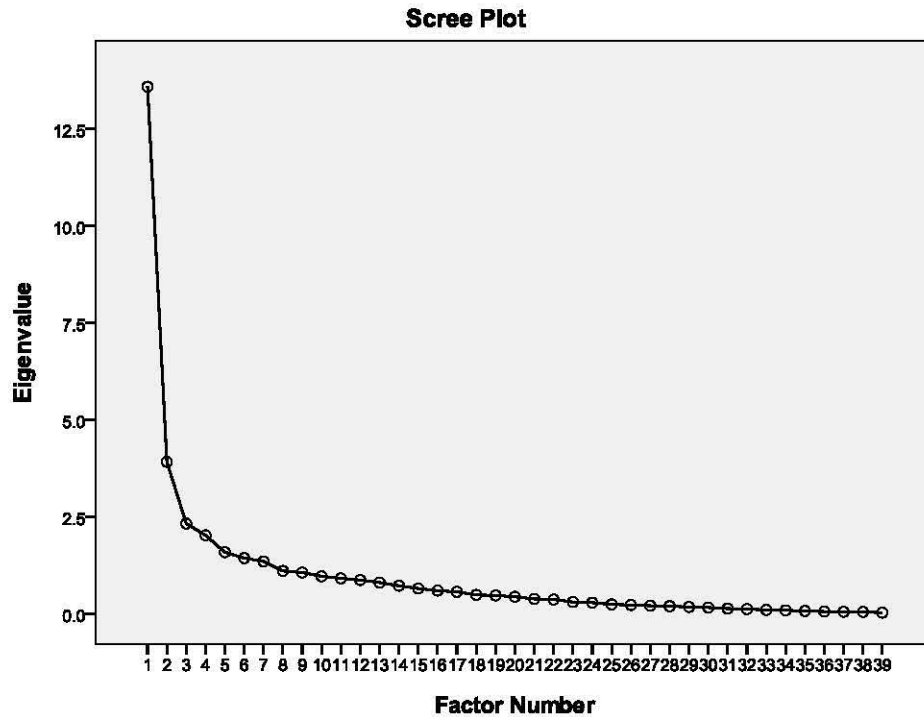


Figure 5. Scree plot

In setting up four-factor solution, running the factor analysis again, a new table of Total Variance Explained was produced (see Table 4.14).

In Table 4.14, the final results showed that a total of 51.20% of the variance was explained by these four factors with Factor 1 contributing 33.71%, Factor 2 contributing 8.90% and Factor 3 contributing 4.59%, and Factor 4 contributing 3.99%, compared with over 72.8% explained by the nine factors.

To aid in the interpretation of four factors, they were rotated and oblimin rotation was performed as these factors were expected to be interrelated. The factor loadings for the rotated solution are given in the Table 4.15.

Table 4.14

Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	13.585	34.834	34.834	13.147	33.711	33.711	10.967
2	3.912	10.031	44.865	3.470	8.899	42.609	4.912
3	2.322	5.955	50.820	1.791	4.593	47.203	2.177
4	2.020	5.180	56.000	1.557	3.993	51.196	9.904

Table 4.15

Pattern Matrix for PAF with Oblimin Rotation of Three Factor Solution of LCC Items

Item	Pattern coefficients				Communalities Extraction
	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor	
	1	2	3	4	
22. engaged ongoing improvement	.996				.885
12. goals to growth	.816				.605
20. shared vision	.767				.658
39. leaders support learning	.757				.542
35. caring environment	.631				.580
17. supportive leaders	.629				.575
23. mutual interaction encouraged	.625				.742
13. incentives aligned goals	.611				.491
36. belonging	.591				.556
33. commitment is identity	.578				.402
21. reaching mission continuously	.530				.553
24. engagement encouraged	.473				.562
15. ongoing learning	.429				.392
40. innovative knowledge produced	.414				.326
18. natural learning supported	.363				.391
08. freedom		.815			.687
07. motivation		.782			.648
06. competitive		.730			.616
04. learning culture		.702			.576
03. multi-culture		.632			.487
05. entrance		.564			.383
02. mission understanding		.499			.383

Table 4.15

Pattern Matrix for PAF with Oblimin Rotation of Three Factor Solution of LCC Items (Continued)

Item	Pattern coefficients				Communalities Extraction
	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor	
	1	2	3	4	
14. goals establishment		-.384			.187
10. bossed around			.619		.552
11. external-discipline			.571		.322
09. figures of authority			.508		.258
28. able to think critically				.812	.614
31. helped others related to work				.786	.599
32. helped others non- related work				.720	.487
27. able to learn				.708	.539
26. cooperate in proximity				.663	.703
25. able to explore issues				.594	.641
38. opportunities to discuss issues				.560	.384
30. be encouraged to learn				.496	.609
34. trust and respect colleagues				.475	.565
37. relationships developing				.407	.461
29. be encouraged to work				.338	.501
16. significance of collaboration				.292	.222
19. future preparation				.269	.284

The rotated four-factor solution that is shown in the Pattern Matrix table (Table 4.15), indicates that the Items loadings on the four factors with 19 items loading above 0.3 on Factor 1, 7 items loading on Factor 2, 3 items loading on Factor 3, and 12 items loading on Factor 4, met our expectation that each Factor is defined

by at least three variables, and further support the previous decision to retain four factors.

The rotated solution revealed the presence of simple structure (Thurstone, 1947), with four factors showing a number of strong loadings and most variables loading substantially on one factor only. Only few items appeared to load on two different factors; these items were loaded onto the most important factor in which they had the highest loading. For instance, Item 29, which with loading 0.343 in Factor 1, was loaded onto Factor 4 with a higher loading 0.496; Item 33, which with loading 0.347 in Factor 1, was loaded onto Factor 4 with a higher loading 0.475; Item 36, which with loading 0.317 in Factor 1, was loaded onto Factor 4 with a higher loading 0.407; and Item 28, with loading 0.32 in Factor 1, was loaded onto Factor 4 with a higher loading 0.338. These four factors were named as:

- Factor 1: development perceptions
- Factor 2: collegial environment
- Factor 3: leadership and authority
- Factor 4: constructive practice

Across the four main factors, the interpretation of the common factors is summarised as follows: the Factor 1 had its highest loadings on Items engaged ongoing improvement (22, 1.0), goals to growth (12, 0.82), shared vision (20, 0.77), leaders support learning (39, 0.76), caring environment (35, 0.63), supportive leaders (17, 0.63), mutual interaction encouraged (23, 0.63), incentives aligned goals (13, 0.61), belonging (36, 0.59), commitment is identity (33, 0.58), reaching mission continuously (21, 0.53), engagement encouraged (24, 0.47), ongoing learning (15, 0.43), innovative knowledge produced (40, 0.41), and natural learning supported (18, 0.36).

The interpretation of Factor 1, identified from the factor analysis, is related to how stakeholders perceive their organisations. The commonality in the high

ranking items is attached to goals, vision, growth and improvement. The factor can be described as “development perceptions”.

Factor 2 had its highest positive loadings on Items, freedom (08, 0.82), motivation (07, 0.78), competitive (06, 0.73), learning culture (04, 0.70), multi-culture (03, 0.63), entrance (05, 0.56), mission understanding (02, 0.50), and a negative loading goals establishment (04, -0.38). The above Items holding highest positive scores indicate how stakeholders’ value their work context that are positively correlated to a number of underlying variables; for example, Item 7 relates to participants who are given the power to make their own way or are entitled to full freedom in learning and research; Item 5 relates to competitiveness and initiatives to encourage learning, while Item 13 holding a negative score indicates their organisation’s goals, that are established by either the University Council or the governing body of the company, negatively correlated to their work contexts. Therefore the binding factor seems to be related to “collegial environment”.

Three items strongly loaded with Factor 3. They are, bossed around (10, 0.62), external-discipline (11, 0.57) and, figures of authority (09, 0.51). These Items related to how organised the leadership is. For example, Item 9, “Academics/employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient”, and Item 8 “Academics/employees see seniors/employers as figures of authority”. The factor is considered to be “leadership and authority”.

Factor 4 comprised 13 Items having strong loadings, they are: able to think critically (28, 0.81), helped others related to work (31, 0.79), helped others non-related work (32, 0.72), able to learn (27, 0.71), cooperate in proximity (26, 0.67), able to explore issues (25, 0.60), opportunities to discuss issues (38, 0.56), be encouraged to learn (30, 0.50), trust and respect colleagues (34, 0.48), relationships developing (37, 0.41), be encouraged to work (29, 0.34), significance of collaboration (16, 0.30), and future preparation (19, 0.30). The following Items seem to report an autonomy-based learning community: Item 28, “I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have

been working on”; Item 31, “I have helped others to solve issues related to our work”; Item 32, “I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my role”; Item 26, “I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes”; Item 25, “I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process”; Item 38, “I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work”, suggested personal behaviours for learning and research activities. The remaining items seem to reflect a co-operative based learning community in their work context: Item 27, “my workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people”; Item 30, “I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning”; item 34 “I trust my colleagues’ critical feedback and respect their support of my work”; Item 37, “I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues”; Item 29, “I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted”, Item 16, “The ways in which university members/staff work and learn together are crucial to the development of university community”; Item 19, “My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow/my company requires employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market”, suggested collaboration and enjoyment of learning community work. Thus, Factor 4 is considered to be pertinent to “constructive practice”. Appendix L depicts the factor loading on each of the LCCs.

Factor analysis of the survey-questionnaire data identified four specific constituent components of a sense of learning community which were also reflected in the perceptions of interview respondents.

The analysis of the survey data revealed that LCC1 and LCC2 predominantly loaded on Factor One. The interview data also supported the findings from the survey-questionnaires. For example, the respondent (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06) who reported positive perceptions pertinent to the understanding of the organisational mission statement (LCC1) by reporting that “well, to have the mission to see the ... community prosper you’ve got to be very good at what you

do, and to be good at what you do you need to learn all the time”, also illustrated the significance of their organisational commitment to ongoing learning as a key to fulfil its mission statement, as exemplified earlier in the analysis of LCC2.

In addition, the findings from the survey-questionnaires showed that, LCC3 and LCC4 loaded on Factor Two and Factor Three, respectively, suggesting high levels of existence of the two constituent issues in their perceptions of the sense of learning community in their workplaces, namely, collegial environment and leadership authority. The analysis of the survey questionnaire data also showed that LCC5 and LCC6 loaded on Factor Four, the results of which were referred to in the previous analysis of LCC5 and LCC6 interview data, where there was a close link between what the respondents were allowed in terms of freedom of group membership and how they valued their own behaviours in their workplace practices.

These findings provided an empirically validated answer to the third sub-question of the Research Question 2, “to what extent do the operationalised criteria fit stakeholders’ perceptions?” and the discussion of those findings with reference to the literature review can be found in the next chapter.

Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter presented the results of the quantitative findings from the survey-questionnaires as well as the results of the qualitative findings from subsequent interviews and documents. The analysis of these findings produced descriptive evidence of different perceptions on each of the six Learning Community Criteria (LCC) and these differences were analysed in light of cross-cultural and organisational comparisons. Importantly, the findings from this study produced four common factors from the participants across four different organisations compared to the original six LCCs.

The following chapter synthesises, analyses and evaluates the research data, discusses the above findings in the context of the related literature review and in relation to each research question and to the overall research aim.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this final chapter, the results of the study are discussed in relation to the research aim and each of the research questions, and the relevant literature.

This study sought and examined data from stakeholders at a university and a business organisation in Australia and in China, respectively; in particular, their views and perceptions towards their sense of learning community in their work environments. The discussion is based on the analysis of the findings gained through documentary review, questionnaire surveys and subsequent interviews in this study. The discussion of this chapter interprets the main findings reported in Chapter 4 based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, which are then related to the results of the questionnaire surveys and interviews.

This chapter expands on the findings presented in the previous chapter and substantiates what has been found based on the reviewed literature as it seeks to account for the powerful and potentially fertilising effect of learning community and indicating forces acting on the community and its practice. In accord with the major research questions, the discussion embraces

- Stakeholders' Perceptions – Work Context as a Learning Community, and
- Stakeholders' Perceptions – Towards Operationalised Learning Community Criteria (LCC).

Findings Related to Research Questions

The data on which this section are based are presented in Chapter 4; the data discussed here are done so with regard to each of the contributing research questions.

Stakeholders' Perceptions – Work Context as a Learning Community

Research Question 1: How do stakeholders perceive their work contexts as a learning community?

In response to the research question as to how stakeholders perceive their work context as a learning community, the results are discussed for each of two headings: Cross-cultural differences and Institutional differences.

Cross-cultural differences in stakeholders' perceptions

Different perceptions from two culturally different groups of university stakeholders regarding their sense of learning community in their work environment are discussed, one by Chinese University [CU] in a Faculty of Economics and one by Australian University [AU] in a Faculty of Business. The focus is concerned with the degree to which different views perceived along each of 40 scale questions in the survey instrument support their universities as learning communities. The results in the previous chapter showed that there were 32 out of the 40 questions where differences in mean scores were statistically significant with p -values of 0.05 or less (see Appendix J1).

In general, CU academic staff tended to provide more positive responses than the Australian academic staff. Data drawn from the survey indicated that the Chinese academics were more likely to report positive feedback, suggesting that the CU was described and supported by its employees as a learning community. On the other hand, Australian academics provided more critical responses than Chinese academics. The findings derived from the survey-questionnaire showed that respondents in AU academic positions were more likely to report less optimistic responses to the questionnaire items, suggesting that they were far more critical when considering their working environment as a learning community.

Australian and Chinese University respondents in this study overall responded differently, yet there were similarities in the way they reported their perceptions

of their working environment as a learning community. As shown in Appendix J1 these questions, tended to refer to how academics worked at an individual level.

The data suggested that a sense of learning community perceived by both Australian and Chinese University respondents was clearly related to the degree to which the university work contexts facilitated their learning practice, particularly in relation to their individual learning. The similar perceptions shared by the two cross-cultural university cohorts on items, for example, Item 27, “My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people”, and Item 28, “I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on”, could be explained by their perceptions of work contexts that offer opportunities for sharing and critiquing individual learning (Schon, 1983) as individuals’ learning process of the detection and correction of errors (Argyris, 2002a) in explicit ‘theory-in-use’ (Argyris & Schon, 1978). What emerged, however, was the accomplishment that the ‘new ideas and skills’, and ‘new perspectives’ that were acknowledged by respondents reflected the creation of new knowledge, and transfer of ‘tacit knowledge’ (Hildreth & Kimble, 2004; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) or the sharing of ‘mental models’ (Senge, 1990, 2006) within both Australian and Chinese Universities.

In addition, different perceptions from the two culturally different business employees groups regarding their sense of learning community in their work environment also are discussed, through one Chinese hi-tech company [CB] at the department of Interactive Entertainment Business System and one Australian Energy and Network business [AB].

As reported in Chapter 4, responding to the 40 survey question items, in which they were asked to rate their perceptions of their organisations, there were 18 survey-questionnaire items where there were statistically significant differences between these two cross-cultural Business groups. Of particular interest, however, was the finding that the two Business cohorts yielded more similar results than the two University cohorts as to how employees perceived their work environments

as a learning community. There were 22 out of 40 question items where there were no statistically significant differences in the way that the two business cohorts perceived their learning environments (see Appendix J2). Those items, for example, Item 35, “My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment”; Item 18, “Learning is a natural process and my company provides opportunities to facilitate it”, where both business cohorts expressed similar views it tended to refer to their perceptions of their work contexts more at the organisational behaviour level than at their individual learning level. The way business employees in this study perceived learning confirmed much of what was suggested in the literature, in which individuals perceive themselves as “connected to the world” rather than “separate from the world” (Senge, 2006, p. 12), or as situated “a social learning system that goes beyond the sum of its parts” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 34). The data examined in this study provided empirical evidence demonstrating that, while the two business organisations are cross-culturally different, there was consensus that employees’ perceptions about their sense of learning community in their work contexts was critically related to the degree to which learning was taken at the organisational level (Chang & Lee, 2007; Watkins, Marsick, & Phillips, 1996; Weldy, 2009) or ‘systems thinking’ (Senge, 1990, 2006).

Institutional differences in stakeholders’ perceptions

Different perceptions from two institutionally different Chinese contexts regarding their sense of learning community in their work environment are discussed, one by Chinese University in the Faculty of Economics [CU] and one by Chinese hi-tech company [CB] in the department of Interactive Entertainment Business System. The focus of this comparison is concerned with the degree to which different views perceived along each of 40 scale questions in the survey instrument support their organisational work contexts, either the University Faculty or Business Department, as learning communities. Results in the previous chapter showed that there were 10 out of 40 discrepant items whose differences in

mean scores were statistically significant with p -values of 0.05 or less (see Appendix K1).

Similarly, as shown in Chapter 4, the ANOVA test also indicated that there were eight statistically significant differences between Australia University (AU) and Australia Business (AB) respondents in the means of their perceptions on the 40 scale questions (see Appendix K2).

These differences clearly pointed to highly statistically significant different perceptions on vision understanding (Item 2), learning culture (Item 4), freedom (Item 8) and shared vision (Item 20). These perceptions reflected differences that occurred as a result of imbalances between the degree of the understanding of the organisational mission and vision, the degree of identifying learning culture in workplaces, and the degree of making their own way in learning. For example, AU respondents reported that their university has a less clear sense of direction, that is, a clear formal mission and vision statement was not widely shared by their staff, and considered by them as less positive for better understanding the vision and mission compared with their Business cohorts. AB respondents, however, highlighted greater identification of learning culture and freedom opportunities as central in engaging in learning and research. The findings, showing highly statistically significant differences across the affiliations, which, surprisingly, indicated that AU respondents perceived more uncertainty regarding these questions.

In general, CU academic staff tended to rate more positive their responses than the CB employees. Data drawn from the survey indicated that the Chinese academics were more likely to report positive feedback, suggesting that the Chinese University was described and supported by its employees as a learning community. Conversely, the findings from the Australian academic staff responses were lower than those from the analysis of the results of the AB participants.

The results of these differences affirmed the findings of the research literature that learning communities in University settings and in Business organisations were perceived differently by their practitioners (Birnbaum, 2000; Garvin, 1993; Kezar, 2006). Differences in perceptions of learning community existed but were not related solely to differences in cultural condition, but also depend on different workplaces. The findings of much of the above research continued to concentrate on their communities and domains. However, recent studies (see, for example, Bell-Angus et al., 2008; J. Mitchell et al., 2008) were more concerned with the context of learning which permeated the extant scholarly literature involving specific single homogeneous case studies. The data from this study has revealed a need to extend the single or simple comparative perspective of the research into a more mixed and interdisciplinary perspective; that is, coping with different institutional organisations in terms of workplace culture and respective practices to contribute insightful understanding to both learning community theory and research.

Stakeholders' Perceptions – Towards operationalised criteria

Research Question 2: How do stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria fit with criteria operationalised from the literature?

How do stakeholders perceive each of the developed criteria that define learning community?

From the Literature, what operationalised criteria define learning community and how do these fit stakeholders' perceptions?

The knowledge base of Learning Community Criteria (LCC) developed in this study was comprised of six operationalised domains, each of which has been the source of much research individually. The examples of these knowledges are reported in Table 2.2 in Chapter 2.

The findings from this study suggested that each domain of the knowledge base was perceived by practitioners differently. Of the 70 responses of respondents in two countries in four institutions to these items, the mean scores for LCC2 and LCC6 were high (above 4.00) indicating that there was a greater level of agreement with these two criteria. In responding to LCC5 and LCC3 of the survey respondents also indicated relatively high levels of agreement with average mean scores above 3.70. The levels of agreement with LCC1 – *shared mission, vision, values, and goals*, and LCC4 about *supportive and shared leadership* were lower than other operationalised criteria.

It can be seen in Chapter 4 that the mean scores for LCC1, LCC3, LCC4 and LCC5 were reported at the level 3 range on the 1 to 5 point Likert scale, indicating that all participants in this study partly supported the view that institutional mission and vision were shared; there had been a collaborative culture and collective inquiry; supportive and shared leadership was received, and freedom of the group membership was achieved. The values for the standard deviation for LCC1, LCC2 and LCC6 were above .70 indicating that there was a wide spread of participants' responses. However, the values for the standard deviation for LCC3, LCC4 and LCC5 were relatively small meaning that participants' responses were more consistent (see Table 4.6, in Chapter 4).

These findings confirmed that participants in this study affirmed

- their institutions' *commitments to continuous improvement* (Bolam et al., 2005; Fullan, 2005; J. Mitchell et al., 2008; Sessa & London, 2006; Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005);
- *proximity* (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Skerlavaj et al., 2010; Sorenson et al., 2006) as a key factor in affecting the sense of learning community;
- there had been a gain in developing *mutual engagement* (L. Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002); and

- the operationalised criteria *Freedom of group membership* (Brown & Duguid, 1991; M. D. Cox, 2004; Senge, 1994; Vaast, 2008; Watson et al., 1997; Wenger et al., 2002) and *Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry* (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Lieberman, 2007; Schwier & Daniel, 2008; Wenger et al., 2002)

However, the finding of this analysis also confirmed that they were more cautious or perhaps more realistic concerning the

- LCC1, *Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals*, which was supported by a number of researchers (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Hord, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Senge, 1990, 2006; Stoll et al., 2006), and similarly
- LCC4, *Supportive and Shared Leadership* (Atak & Erturgut, 2010; Berson et al., 2006; Little, 2008; Scribner et al., 2007; Senge, 1990, 2006; Viskovic, 2006).

In this study the data demonstrated that each of these operationalised criteria was perceived differently by all four groups of participants. In other words, this study found that assessing how stakeholders' perceptions of their workplaces as learning communities fit with the operationalised six criteria from existing literature were often predicated on their particular work conditions underlain by respective national culture. However, whether or not their work environments can be characterised as learning communities required that each of the four institutions be considered carefully within the context of its own practice. The difference of culture impacting on beliefs such as the four presented in this study should be regarded cautiously without corroborating evidence.

Are there cross-cultural differences in stakeholder perceptions towards each of the developed criteria?

LCC1: Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

The first criterion identified from the literature implied that shared mission, vision, values and goals inform community members' decisions and actions. For a community to work, all the community participants have to agree on the 'destination'. To develop meaningful learning communities, an important focus must be on developing shared mission/vision statements defined for interagency agreements; shared values/belief/concerns for clarifying what is important to them or what they should focus on; and shared goals and expectations for the extent to which what learning outcomes can be satisfied by community membership.

In this study, Australian and Chinese participants – in their employees' role – were investigated to explore their institutions' missions, visions, values and goals and, in particular, the 'rhetoric' of their organisations. As shown in Chapter 4, 39 items in the survey questionnaire were utilised for capturing academic staff perceptions of their institutions.

The data showed that all four cases clearly have developed explicit mission/vision statements and a set of values that embodied their commitments as presented in Chapter 4, such as:

- “to the creation, preservation, communication and application of knowledge” (AU);
- “to train the high-level and creative personnel, to promote the innovation of knowledge and technology, and to serve the development of economics and society” (CU);
- “to be the company most welcomed into people's homes and businesses” (AB); and
- “to be the most respected Internet company” (CB).

In the Chinese University, for example, a strong learning focus is an intrinsic part of the Chinese University's mission, particularly given its status as a university directly under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. It was clearly articulated on the Office for Strategic Development & Research of the University

website that the University focuses on the students' all-round capability and creativity in teaching and education. The University announced that it was perfectly combined with 'class teaching-campus culture-social practice' and made this the basis for educating and developing students. Such a description, with its emphasis on developing a 'high level campus cultural atmosphere to exert the educational function with deep cultural background' aligns the motto of the university detailed in its Development Report (2006) in ensuring that it is "dedication to the public interests, acquisition of all-round capability and aspiration for each passing progress". This institution also had taken pride in its history, "the University, since its foundation, has produced batches of prominent talents such as late Premier Zhou Enlai, Dr. Shiing-shen Chern (Chinese-American mathematician) and Dr. Ta-you Wu (atomic and nuclear theoretical physicist)".

The Chinese University has clearly espoused its direction in the Strategic Objective that, by 2010, it will improve significantly its quality of teaching, academic standards and overall educational strength, which will enable some niche disciplines to rank highly in the international field. In order to respond to these requirements, the University has opened a series of course 'specialties' catering to social demands and, after a long-term commitment, has made a name for its high-level academic learning environment, prudent scientific training and positive student experience.

The findings of this study (presented in Chapter 4) demonstrated that participants agreed that their organisations have a shared vision and explicit set of values. Most interviewees also positively commented that their organisational mission and vision statements were shared to some extent. For example, participants were asked to clarify the mission/vision of the company which represented their understandings of their company's directions. A typical comment came from one AB participant who reported:

We are quite clear with what our purpose is – to serve the ... community and prosper from our efforts. Everyone is aligned with our services ... so within [our company] we have network business, retail business, telecommunication business um... and all of them come up to this purpose. So you see the purpose is the same. When it gets down into the detail you can see it specifically for that division. And because we have a common purpose everyone in the company understands that we are here to deliver our essential service, electricity ... the purpose was something developed with the staff. So all the staff agreed that this was the purpose, and the bit about being the [local] company most welcome in people's homes and businesses. That's saying something about how we do our work. So people should be proud to work for the company and therefore, whatever we do, we should be welcoming, so it says the type of company we are (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06).

Although there seems to be agreement that all four organisations developed a shared vision and explicit set of values (Item 3), and the documentary analysis also revealed that their mission and vision statements were formulated clearly and in place, the employees' understanding of their organisational vision and mission (Item 1) seems to be rather vague or 'fuzzy'. The quantitative data from this study demonstrated that despite statistically significant difference between the two countries, respondents' responses were similar in terms of the understanding the vision and mission of their organisation. Australian respondents had a much weaker sense of their organisation's direction than Chinese respondents. For example, Item 13 "Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals/The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals", $F(1, 69) = 5.267, p < .025$, the means of the Australian participants ($M = 3.53$) were significantly lower but similar to that of the Chinese cohorts ($M = 4.10$). This was also the case when it came to interview questions such as, 'What is fundamental purpose of [organisation name] and can you describe the mission?' Some interviewees from CU commented that the role of the mission was not known, making statements such as: "I don't know... I may

have seen in a document, but I don't think I've ever taken much notice of it" (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9). The data demonstrated that their organisational mission, vision statements or values and goals were not transmitted clearly to the organisation's individual members. Despite the participants reporting commitment to the mission, vision values and goals were demonstrated by extant statements, (for example in CU, establishing an office entitled "Office for Strategic Development & Research", whose role it is to formulate planning, counter-measure and policy research of the development of the university and provide communication to its employees), participants' perceptions were less clear about the directions of their institutions and how they could be shared and communicated.

In this study, the LCC1 – the role of shared mission, vision, values and goals, as an important factor of cultivating a learning community, has been the focus of much research historically. In business, Senge (1990) stressed the significance of a shared vision where employees participate in the development of a corporate vision, and can then make decisions and take actions consistent with the directions set by senior leadership through the shared visioning process. In the educational context, LCC1 reflected the practices described in several research papers published in Samaras, Freese et al., (2008). For example, 'shared values and vision' also was identified as one of the core catalysts that promoted and sustained a learning community in a university setting (Samaras, Adams-Legge et al., 2008). A 'tiny' learning community where a group of four scholars are separated by geography, working in different universities was developed based upon 'having common values' (Kosnik, 2008). As discussed in the literature review chapter, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) also argued that shared mission, vision, values and goals must be clearly defined taking into consideration what must know and be able to do successfully. They have argued:

Engaging members of an organisation in reflective dialogue about the fundamental purpose of the organisation, as Principal Dion attempted to do, can be a powerful strategy for improvement. In fact, the first question any organisation must consider if it hopes to improve results is the question of purpose. Why does

our organisation exist? What are we here to do together? What exactly do we hope to accomplish? What is the business of our business? ... Effective districts build a collective sense of efficacy throughout the organisation by establishing a clear purpose, widely shared (DuFour et al., 2010, pp. 29-30).

The four sites in this study clearly documented their organisations' missions and visions. The statistical results confirmed the mission and vision were in place with the finding of an overall agreement on LCC1 where participants reported a general agreement with total means score of 3.54 (see Table 4.6, in Chapter 4). This finding was consistent with research (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour & Eaker, 2009; Hord, 2004; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Senge, 1990, 2006; Stoll et al., 2006) showing that all of our case sites do have mission and vision statements in place to take into account the importance of providing a clear sense of organisational directions for implementing a learning community, but, importantly, they were not widely shared or able to be articulated by the participants.

This study indicated that having strong rhetoric in relation to mission/vision statements, and clear values and goals does not guarantee they can be shared and then operationalised by employees. The findings of this study suggested that the implementation of affirmative rhetoric was a lot more difficult to implement. Neither Australian nor Chinese participants fully comprehended their organisation's missions, visions, values and goals. As reported in Chapter 4, this finding was supported by survey-questionnaire data, for example, Item 02, "Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?" $F(1, 69) = 6.250, p < .015$, the mean scores for Australian and Chinese responses were 1.77 and 2.33, respectively, and by interview data, for example, "I guess [sic] our mission is to provide quality education for both undergraduate and post-graduate students" (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9); "I don't know... I may have seen a document, but I don't think I've ever taken much notice of it" (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9); "I have never read it. Yes, that's why I said it is not clear" (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10); "I don't take much notice of those localised rules and all sorts of things. I take my

own mission I guess into those equations” (M4, UNI, AU, 4, 14/10). Notwithstanding these comments, their organisations provided mission, vision, values and goals of the organisation’s direction in public statements. The issue here is whether or not such exposure is taken seriously by stakeholders as to the rhetoric but it is not actually enacted in practice within their organisations.

Simply proclaiming their institutional mission and vision provided no basis for achieving a shared agreement and clarity of direction among the University members. This finding is highlighted in the literature by Wenger, McDermott & Snyder (2002) who pointed out that successful learning communities “thrive where the goals and needs of an organization intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants” (p. 32), whereas lack of interest in the stated strategic development among university employees “fails to inspire its members, the community will flounder” (p. 32). Senge (2006) also argued that “when there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-too-familiar ‘vision statement’), people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to” (p. 11). The content analysis of those mission statements revealed that strong, broad assertions are not oriented towards sharing and motivating action, as it makes the values and goals too wishy-washy, “they are all terms that are very difficult to handle” (M4, UNI, AU, 4, 14/10), and, “it needs to be organic, something that staff themselves really drive” (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

This study also suggested that lack of employees’ interest in the stated strategic development reflected the need for orientation and professional development initiatives to allow for transmission of information about organisational mission, vision, values and goals. The finding sheds some light on the introduction of direction on shaping their employees’ understanding. Notwithstanding some of the data obtained from this study there were some professional development programs for employees’ personal learning; however, none of them when interviewed mentioned the centrality of personal development aligned with organisational mission, vision, values and goals through any orientation

programs. The findings are consistent with Senge (2006) who stated that “what has been lacking is a discipline for translating individual vision into shared vision – not a ‘cookbook’ but a set of principles and guiding practices” (p. 11), and who suggested that organisational ‘systems thinking’ need to avoid “painting lovely pictures of the future with no deep understanding of the forces” (Senge, 2006, p. 12). This also fit with McKenna (1992) who earlier reported a considerable gap between ‘vision’ and ‘current reality’, and that this is likely to be “a cause of discouragement, cynicism and declining enthusiasm within any organisation” (p. 28).

A significant issue is how the situation can be improved and how the value can be created “by connecting the personal development and professional identities of practitioners to the strategy of the organisation” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 17). A. Cox (2005) suggested that the notion of organisational goals is not a coherent one; aligning the work of disparate units or multiple individual purposes with an organisation’s direction is profoundly problematic, and requires much more effort by management. This study also suggested further attempts to close the gaps between conceptual rhetoric and actual perceptions, between organisational and personal value can be made to develop professional development programs either formally or informally in providing opportunities for individual employees to better understand their organisations’ mission, vision, values and goals.

While sharing explicit and tangible mission and vision statements can be considered as the glue which empowers an organisation to function as a learning community; in this study, the overall results demonstrated that they were not always evident in employees’ perceptions.

LCC2: Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Research into learning communities highlighted that the organisation demonstrated an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement (see, for example,

DuFour, 2009; DuFour et al., 2010; Reichstetter, 2006). The second criterion was designed to examine whether stakeholders' organisations are engaged in that cycle and how the participants from the four sites reflected their commitment to achieve the organisation's Mission, Vision, Values and Goals. The criterion was comprised of five items in the survey questionnaires, and was defined to include learning culture, goals to growth, ongoing learning, engaged ongoing improvement, and community commitment.

The statistical findings (see Chapter 4) revealed significant differences on questionnaire items measuring LCC2 perceived by participants in each of the organisations within the two national groups. Australian respondents had less positive mean scores than their Chinese counterparts; for example, Item 22, "My university/company is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement", $F(1, 69) = 44.673, p < .001$, the means of the Australian academics ($M = 3.53$) were statistically significantly lower than that of Chinese cohort ($M = 4.80$),

The interview data from both Chinese participant groups also reported that there was a special section or department, either entitled "Strategic development and Research Office" in the CU, or "R&D Center", in the CB, where their central work was to ensure continual monitoring and sustainable improvement of their institutions.

Documentary evidence also was found on their official websites in relation to; for example, the "Strategic development and Research Office" of the CU website, the major responsibilities of their work were carrying out investigations, collecting data, compiling and analysing data, reflecting and tracking the dynamic situation of the development and planning of the other major universities in order to provide supporting factual bases for the decision making of the CU.

Some of the Australian Business interviewees were highly supportive of their organisation's commitments to LCC2 whereas some University academic staff were critical. As reported in Chapter 4, the interview data revealed that there were

notable differences between individuals and the institutional message regarding the vision in the Australian University; for example, one academic staff reported, “I am most probably a bit of a critic, because my philosophy on education [more freedom]... [result in] are maybe a little mismatched sometimes.” (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10). Another academic staff also expressed his uncertainty and concluded that, “it is never going to come to anything” when referring to the intention of their university to implement its stated commitment to continuous improvement (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

In relation to Research Question 2, the data provided evidence that there were pronounced cross-cultural differences between Australian and Chinese perceptions towards LCC2 item questions, particularly in relation to perceptions of the implementation of LCC2. That is, individuals’ perceptions and related behaviour or intention to learn reflect the degree to which their organisation/institution takes sustainable development seriously, develops and maintains a system of ongoing cycle of continuous improvement by planning, implementing, data gathering, evaluating, reviewing, reflecting as its commitment to continuous improvement. This finding is similar to DuFour and his colleagues’ (2010) report.

The research evidence from this study are consistent with much of the literature about LCC2. For example, DuFour and Eaker (2009) suggested that having a commitment to continuous improvement towards results is a key concept to define a learning community. DuFour et al., (2010) further explained that what they described as the commitment to continuous improvement for developing a learning community is “not simply to learn a new strategy, but instead to create conditions for perpetual learning” (p. 5), in order to turn words into actions.

The findings of this study demonstrated that careful attention in LCC2 has been paid by the two Chinese organisations, whereas there were notable deficiencies in the Australian University. As noted in Chapter 4, interview respondents were unsure, for example, “it is never going to come to anything” about the intention of

their University (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10) and “A lot of emphasis is put on the process, and not so much the outcome” (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10). If Australian academic staff were not convinced of the outcomes being met in their organisation’s mission and vision, it is likely they would not commit to an ongoing expansion of their competencies to achieve their organisation’s desired outcomes (Bierema, 1999) and the capacity to develop learning community was largely limited as their employees were not sufficiently committed to reach the ideal target.

LCC3: Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry

Learning communities are operationalised through collaboration. Participants in this study were asked 11 questions in relation to LCC3 with regards to the initiatives on how a collaborative culture and collective enquiry were developed and sustained in their organisations. Some questions were designed explicitly to capture the extent to which stakeholders’ motivation, confidence and disposition to learn has been supported by their work environment; for example, Item 29, “I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted” and for example, Item 03, “In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?”, sought to identify how diverse the participant’s work environment was. The issue lying behind this question relates to collective knowledge of a learning community where interaction and communication were executed across different nationality, religious and/or cultural groups, and, therefore, “expand the resources of the community by integrating different population perspectives and skills in the search for solutions to community problems” (Morton, 2003, p. 105). All contributing items to LCC3 were adapted from existing literature through the lens of collaborative culture of learning and a collective inquiry process (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Lieberman, 2007; Schwier & Daniel, 2008; Wenger et al., 2002).

Both the forced response items in the survey and the interview data from both Australian and Chinese participants overwhelmingly indicated that they benefited in their learning from working in collaborative groups. For example, Item 16, “The ways in which university/staff members work and learn together are crucial to the development of university/business community”, the mean scores for Australian and Chinese responses were 4.10 and 4.58, respectively.

The majority of Chinese University participants also clearly stated positive responses regarding LCC3, suggesting they had experiences of working together and in turn benefited in their own learning. For example, one academic staff reported, “we considered different disciplines ... we have tapped into people with different talents and different knowledge endeavouring to collaborate around common goals” (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09). Another academic staff responded that “there was ample evidence available that verified how drawing on the experiences of other equivalent research areas, stimulated and affected the development of our own research area” (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

Positive comments in the support of the benefit of the collaboration also were made by Australian University interviewees. For example, one Australian academic staff commented “I find joint research and publications teaches me more than doing it singly” (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10).

While most University interview participants reported collaboration occurred within their workplace, their collaborative behaviours remained an issue under the surface of its positive collaboration. For example, some Australian interviewees clearly stated that there was not much collaboration or discussion inside their workplace. As noted in Chapter 4, one Australian academic staff reported, “I have alienated the potential to have other collegial discussions with some of my colleagues. So I have less discussions and conversations with people inside my faculty” (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10). Another Australian academic staff also viewed the collaboration as not providing valuable sources of new ideas, and commented on the frustration of sharing information across different disciplines by reporting

that “I just find their approach ... they are just two totally different things and a lot of their approaches won’t work... Someone’s going to pick up the odd very very small thing ...” (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10). This finding provided some empirical evidence suggesting that collaboration alone does not ensure knowledge sharing (Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Orr, 1990; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002), and distribution of knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 2000).

The Chinese Business participants’ perceptions were slightly different from those in the Chinese University. The majority of interviewees in Chinese Business were more positive and also reported that opportunities to share insights and discussions through open and candid conversations were provided, which supported a collaborative and collective organisation. For example, the comment of a Chinese Business participant reinforced this point:

The most important thing is how to better cooperate with our colleagues to be able to get together, and to reach agreements or understandings about what we take for granted, what we can do to provide the best value for our customers (F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10).

The fact that the collaborative culture was developed as a result of a desire within the Chinese Business employees to facilitate and explore the collective intelligence that was rooted in the business members and implement it for the benefits of all business members and their customers. This further reinforces evidence of LCC3 when Wenger (1998) described the organisation as a “constellation of communities”, or earlier as a “collective of communities” (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

It is not appropriate to suggest that the most positive responses from either the survey-questionnaires or interviews confirm collaborative and collective efforts were effective, or that their workplaces approximate desired learning community practices (Brown & Duguid, 2000; Orr, 1996; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). Those participants who had experiences in collaborative events in the Chinese Business and who reported few negative

experiences about collective inquiry also cannot be ignored, even though these participants were few in number. Of particular note was the fact that the few negative experiences emerged from the Chinese Business participants. Where they were engaged in collaborative and collective inquiry they were of little benefit; as reported by some of their colleagues that some people “do not like to pour out, or just do not like being involved in talking” (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

However, the survey-questionnaire results elicited from the Chinese Business participants were statistically significantly different from the Australian cohorts.

Some of Australian interviewees reported they were reluctant to share what they know. Comments such as the following were typical of those who were not sharing even they were engaged in collaboration and discussion of work issues with their colleagues:

People I have got working around me at the moment have a bit ... there are a lot of people relying on my skills from groups I have left behind. They still want meetings with me as well. That's has made it very difficult for me. They want my information. It's quite difficult (M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06).

This would suggest that the lack of knowledge sharing between colleagues meant that, for practitioners in their workplaces, collaboration was primarily just a slogan or depicted as individual benefit, rather than sharing a domain of knowledge and practice as described by Wenger (1998) and, therefore, this inhibited the practitioners' learning from each other and, this lack of sharing, in turn, created disharmony within their teams.

Another Australian Business interviewee reported this as an idiographic factor:

Some people see knowledge as power and by sharing knowledge they lose power. So they don't have a mindset around sharing knowledge so I think that a big factor to it, people are frightened if I share this

information I would lose power (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

While many of the underpinning studies of learning community, such as situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998), activity theory (Engeström, 1995) all support the view that “knowledge is distributed through collaborative efforts toward shared objectives or by dialogues and challenges brought about by difference in persons’ perspectives” (Pea, 1993, p. 48), some collaboration efforts from the analysis of the data in this study emphasise the power of individualistic learning on individual achievement. This aspect has been largely ignored in discussions of a learning community, for example,

Coordination is tight. Ideas and knowledge may be distributed across the group, not held individually. These groups allow for highly productive and creative work to develop collaboratively. (Brown & Duguid, 2000, p. 143)

It was clear that the knowledge sharing issue raised from this study can be generated by an openness in attitude, and such a lack of attitude remains problematic in the development of collaborative learning communities. The negative quotes from Australian institutions indicated how the interviewee was less effective at promoting collective learning and where there was less willingness of members to share their experiences and knowledge with other collegial members.

Central to practitioners’ attitudes is the issue of understanding their organisational cultural norms and attributes as a learning community that encourage knowledge exchange (see, also Holtshouse, 1998; Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Individuals’ participation and engagement in a learning community of practice was directed by their degree of understanding and knowledge of that situation. The personal knowledge that has developed can be seen as their organisational cultural knowledge repository. G. H. Hofstede (1980) has demonstrated that culture – as

the collective beliefs and values of a group – influence and motivate human behaviours. For example, the attitude towards knowledge sharing may be accounted for by their organisational cultural values. G. H. Hofstede's five dimensions demonstrated the cultural differences between 'Western' such as Australia, and 'Eastern', such as China, in terms of "collectivism versus individualism".

Although the data of this study were extracted from individuals' perception of their own behaviours in two countries, the findings were consistent with G. H. Hofstede's (1980) operationalisation, demonstrating that Australian participants represented high individualism culture whereas Chinese participants tended to be more collectivist. Similar to the example described in Samaras, Adams-Legge et al., (2008), their learning community practice "has inherent paradoxes, such as the tension between its individual and collective aspects" (p. 134). Australian participants in this study such as those reported earlier perceived the more they knew, the more valuable they were in their organisations reflecting the high degree of individuality that, in turn, inhibited knowledge transfer and sharing across their institutions. In this much of their collaborations and collective efforts were based on "person comes first". This challenged the participants' workplaces as learning communities and required attention to shift from focusing on individualism to developing their institutions towards a more collaborative culture, more reflective dialogue and collective inquiry-orientated practices for shared learning and knowledge creation.

LCC4: Supportive and Shared Leadership

Much research on the role of leadership has been undertaken in numerous disciplines in the context of education, organisational management, and psychology and so on (see, for example, Atak & Erturgut, 2010; Berson et al., 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Studies on learning community recently have attracted an increasingly growing interest towards developing supportive leadership behaviours and nurturing a shared leadership relationship.

Leadership is suggested to be shared and distributed among formal and informal leaders (G. H. Hofstede, 1980; Phillips, 2003; Reichstetter, 2006). Mintzberg (1975) concurs but also coins a new term “communityship” to further differentiate the role of leadership as leveraging affinities “between individual practice of leadership on one side and collective citizenship on the other side” (p. 2). If a learning community does not appear to be fully implemented by sharing and distributing power and authority through decision making and shared leadership, then that community may be identified as facing a problem in shaping the community’s mission, vision, values and goals. A strong learning community requires the “collegial and supportive participation of an instructor who shares leadership and facilitates the work” of community members, and who “needs to be able to participate without dominating, and must choose activities that encourage collaboration and personal accountability” (Samaras, Adams-Legge et al., 2008, p. 144).

Nine scale items in the survey questionnaire contributed to LCC4 – Supportive and Shared Leadership, evaluating how the participants from the two countries were able to perceive a supportive and shared leadership.

As shown in Chapter 4, the survey-questionnaire results of this study indicated that Australian respondents perceived leadership as statistically significant different for 7 items compared to their Chinese counterparts. The items were, for example, Item 39, “In my work, the university/company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members” $F(1, 68) = 21.525, p < .001$, the mean scores for Australian and Chinese responses were 3.00 and 4.25, respectively. The statistical finding supported the research which asserts that leadership styles and practices are affected differently by China’s centralised culture with its deeply shaped beliefs, values and distinctive social ethos (G. H. Hofstede, 2001; House et al., 1997).

G. H. Hofstede (1980) has explicitly positioned China as a high power distance index (PDI) culture, in which the Chinese would be more likely to acknowledge

and expect a hierarchical order, where people have more power if they are at the top of the hierarchy. Chinese with less power “expect to accept that power is distributed unequally” (G. H. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 46). Compared with China, Australia was considered as a low power distance society and Australians tend to expect all are equal and believe power is distributed more equally (G. H. Hofstede, 1980, 2001; G. H. Hofstede et al., 2010; G. H. Hofstede et al., 1990; G. J. Hofstede et al., 2002). The data from the survey-questionnaire in this study confirmed the cultural value differences identified by G. H. Hofstede (1980), but the differences showed that Chinese respondents were hesitant to comment negatively or criticise their figures of authority and provided more positive responses; whereas Australian respondents shared negative concerns quite openly.

Interview data provided more insight into the four groups of stakeholders’ perceptions within each case. Interestingly, the survey-questionnaire findings of Chinese responses, which were significantly higher than responses obtained from the Australian respondents, did not seem to match the interview data, and in some cases the mismatches were dramatic, resulting in similar perspectives with Australian findings. For example, Chinese academic staff reported that “we understand instinctively that the authority of the ... is sovereign ... our academic staff are at the bottom ... the relationship between the university leaders and our staff still remains at the pattern of manager and managed level” (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09). “The stress in different power authority between superiors and inferiors is strong” (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9). The disparities between the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the Chinese academic staff in relation to the LCC4 analysis may be attributed to the unique cultural and political milieu, where Chinese respondents more often than not avoid touching politically sensitive issues when answering the questionnaire items. These interview data, however, indicated a high level of inequality acceptance which was based upon the understanding that lower power people should reflect obedience to the higher power authority. As discussed in Chapter 4, it was a clear cultural issue and as reported by a Chinese participant, “China has a long history of centralised power

... there always been some sort of power over everything” (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09). This broad finding demonstrated the cultural dimension (G. H. Hofstede, 1980, 1993; G. H. Hofstede & Bond, 1988; G. H. Hofstede et al., 2010) that there was a high level of power inequality within Chinese society, and the unilateral top-down decision making structure, reflected a centralised and unequally distributed authority and leadership. Australian University counterparts reported that there were attempts to forge a shared voice in decision making processes which reflected the view of G. H. Hofstede (1980) and other researchers (see, for example, Ferraro, 2010) that Australian culture emphasises equality and tends to reduce the impact of power and status differences. However, the data from this study indicated that even though in a low power distance society where power tended to be more distributed, Australian participants in this study reported a challenge which enabled shared decision making processes to be difficult. For example,

I think it is challenging because the university at the highest level, senior levels, have the roles and responsibilities for decisions they need to make. And the faculty, I think probably is reactive, to the initiatives which are coming down. There may be initiatives coming up from the faculty staff, which means the Head of School is sort of sandwiched in between staff coming down and staff that might be coming up. All of that I think makes it difficult for there to be a shared voice (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

The opportunity to participate in the university decision making process through ‘distributed’ leadership was not only acknowledged by the Australian academic staff, but also perceived as a challenge to be achieved.

The findings confirmed Ferraro’s (2010) low power distance description of Australia where the impact of power differences tended to be reduced. In other words, the power relationships emanating from higher authorities were more consultative and democratic (G. H. Hofstede, 1980) in the Australian University, and Australian academic staff “quite readily approach and contradict their bosses”

(G. H. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 45) in that they are more likely to react and less willing to become involved in the initiatives which were passed down from the higher authorities without due reflection and consideration. When participants commented on the process for shared decision making, most academic staff reported that there was a university staff survey entitled “Your Voice” which a senior administrator had conducted recently. Australian academic staff responses in the interview confirmed the purpose of the survey which gave them chances to have their voices heard. These activities suggest there was greater interdependence between the figures of authority and academic staff (Brody, Coulter, & Mihalek, 1998).

However, the data suggested that while a low power distance leadership management may exist many of the Australian academic staff reported concerns about their senior authorities and, in some instances, workplace harassment. Typically the responses from the Australian academic staff were that they were not sure about how powerful their voices were and to what level they would be heard. For example, one Australian academic staff reported that the survey “seems to have a lot of shared opinion going in to it, but how the voices are interpreted and have the voices get reported, I am not sure” (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10). He explained that “the bureaucracy makes it difficult for the shared voice” (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10), which were consistent with the concerns articulated by other academic staff; for example, “a lot of the decision making rests with those core people and it’s up to them the degree in which they consult and discuss with staff about important issues” (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10) and, “I don’t feel like we’ve got much sort of participation of saying anything beyond the faculty” (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10). These findings challenged the low power distance cultural values (G. H. Hofstede, 1980) and question the research findings reported by House et al., (2004) who suggested that leaders were perceived by their university academic staff as trusting and listened to by them. As stated by one Australian academic staff, “shared decision making has seemed to have dried up in the last six or seven years, until this ‘Your Voice’ survey came out” and he expressed

concern about “how far it goes” (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10). On the other hand, the Chinese findings supported fully the high culture power distance culture concept and as reported by a Chinese academic; for example, “universities have become de facto government attached administration bureaucratic apparatus” (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9).

The analysis of Australian and Chinese interviewees’ perceptions on LCC4 in two Business organisations also indicated that although both cohorts were positioned in different power distance cultural values, similar leadership and management behaviour were reported. Chinese Business employees expressed less negative perceptions than the Chinese academic staff when reporting the way authority and power were utilised and the former shared similar sentiments with their Australian Business counterparts. As reported in Chapter 4, Australian Business employees perceived that they were trusted to make their decisions by consulting with their leaders. They were more positive about their role in the shared decision making process and reported, for example, “I can certainly have input and give comment to my manager about what I think we should do ... I am not the ultimate decision maker, but I can certainly have as much input as I like” (F1, BUS, AU, 1, 15/06). Much of the employees’ individual input into decision making was attributed directly to the organisational learning culture. This was further supported by the Australian Business CEO who confirmed that their employees “have lots of ideas and often the best ideas come from front line, ’cause they are the people doing the real work with customers” (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06). The data suggested that the power authority was delegated to each of the individual employees and, in turn, brought collective knowledge back from the empowered employees. The impact of leadership practice enabled continuous individual learning through inviting opportunities for employees to participate in organisational decision making, encouraging input from different perspectives and contexts. Learning therefore was managed organisationally in the process of knowledge sharing and acquisition, as similarly described by Snyder and de Souza Briggs (2003), Wenger (1998), and Wenger et al., (2002).

The data reported from the Australian Business in this study, to a large extent, demonstrated a more collaborative, low power distance, consultative, collective problem solving, distributed decision making and shared leadership behaviours. This reflected the reality in the way in which leadership is enacted to create an organisational culture or climate, which characterised a learning community goal to improve individual and organisational learning (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). The relationship between leadership behaviour and organisational learning reported in the Australian Business organisation supported much of the literature (see, for example, Lei, Slocum, & Pitts, 1999; Llorens-Montes, Ruiz-Moreno, & Garcia-Morales, 2005; Senge, 1990; Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1992), and there was considerable evidence that such supportive and shared leadership had a positive impact on learning in the organisation (Aragón-Correa, García-Morales, & Cordon-Pozo, 2007; Burke et al., 2006; Llorens-Montes et al., 2005; S. J. Shin & Zhou, 2003).

Similarly, as reported in Chapter 4, the interviews with the Chinese Business participants reported a lesser power distance than Chinese academic staff by describing that there was an “open door” policy between the senior authorities and employees. For example,

Our business boasted an open-door policy between managers and lower-level employees, which means the executives, at all levels, must keep an door open to ensure that anybody who has a question or suggestion can see immediately any management member (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

Chinese Business employees also reported that there were efforts to promote a communication bridge between higher authorities and subordinates. As a hi-tech company, Real Time eXchange (RTX) – an instant messaging platform – was used to maintain real time collaboration learning among inner employees and to encourage interaction between themselves and managers. A Bulletin Board System (BBS) was developed and was enabled issues to be brought up on the organisational internal web forum. The General Manager’s Office frequently

reviewed the issues posted on the BBS to ensure that the information from employees could be shared with the organisations' senior executives. These approaches have been identified as essential for the change required to challenge the status quo in which high power culture value dominates Chinese management style.

The results of this study raise some questions about the description of power relations found in the literature (see, for example, Schuler & Rogovsky, 1998; Senge, 1990, 2006), in that they are more context specific and nuanced to that reported typically.

The data reported from the Chinese Business interviewees indicated that the Chinese Business leaders, attempted to alter power relations and to be more consultative, and they exhibited a continuum of leadership behaviour by, for example, randomly inviting subordinates for lunch fortnightly, taking an active role to listen to the voices, share ideas from their subordinates and thus build "bridge between the hierarchical structure of the formal organisation and the horizontal structure of the communities" (Wenger, 2004, p. 6). Employees in the Chinese Business with low power reported concrete examples of how they were invited to have free conversations with superiors and to share in decisions that allowed for unique input. For example, when asked if they have had conversations with someone in higher up positions, one business respondent reported they do "with our team leader in our PDI (Performance Development Interview) ... We have regular PDI, it's like meeting, talking, discussing and thinking a few steps ahead, and deciding what the next step would be (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10). This encouraged open communication, supportive leadership (Hord, 2008), distributed power/leadership (Bolden et al., 2009; Schein, 2010; Spillane & Diamond, 2007) and shared decision making (Gorton & Alston, 2009) entailed in constructing learning community practice.

The findings from the Chinese Business employees in this study were not all in accord with G. H. Hofstede's findings and other recent research results (see, for

example, Matveev & Nelson, 2004). The data suggested that decision making power was likely to be shared by their employees and so establish a democratic relationship between the leaders and employees. As one respondent (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10) commented, “the relationships are quite liberal”. The Chinese Business appeared to try to shorten the distance towards power and the relationship between powerful figures of authority and less powerful members in the organisation. A more democratic leadership style is at odds with what G. H. Hofstede (1980) reported as the more paternalistic leadership style.

However, the data showed that while there had been a change in power distance at the Chinese Business organisation, the employees did not exercise this opportunity ‘willy-nilly’, for example, “I won’t go in the ‘open door’ to talk [to make any trouble] if I have nothing important” (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10). Although the changes in leadership behaviour were continuing, the transition tended to be rather difficult for employees to redefine their roles. This approach-avoidance fit with G. H. Hofstede, (1980), G. H. Hofstede and G. J. Hofstede (2005), or Adsit, London, Crom and D. Jones’s (1997) arguments that employees in high power distance culture societies, such as China, fear disagreements with their authorities, and subordinates are more likely to follow centralised authoritarian decision making and accept unequally distributed power relations. Thus, the potential outcome of learning community ontology of “stewardship” (Wenger et al., 2009) or “communityship” (Mintzberg, 2009) was intended to be built, but to achieve it attention needs to be paid to strategies for the subordinates to contribute to the decision making through empowerment to ensure more open leadership (Gronn, 2009; Mintzberg, 2009; Spillane & Diamond, 2007), transformational leadership (Ford et al., 2000) or shared leadership (Ensley et al., 2006) from the Chinese Business management throughout the organisation.

LCC5: Freedom of group membership

In this study, the survey questions comprising LCC5 dealt with stakeholders’ individual freedom to pursue their knowledge in their own ways. As shown in

Chapter 4, seven items were aggregated in the survey-questionnaires to form this criterion.

In this study, the analysis of significant cultural differences for the LCC5 items in the survey-questionnaires showed that Australian respondents perceived they were given less freedom in learning than Chinese counterparts. For example, Item 08, “Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?”, Australian respondents reported a significantly lower intake ($M = 2.25$) than Chinese respondents ($M = 3.23$), suggesting less time was spent in learning and the support for the degree of freedom was needed.

Interview respondents further demonstrated institutional differences and the responses were quite mixed with both positive and negative comments. The findings indicated that most of the interview data from the four different institutions’ stakeholders concerning a sense of freedom of group membership were reflected with the other LCCs reported earlier.

For example, as shown in Chapter 4, some positive responses reported from Chinese University respondents reflected in LCC3 indicated that their positive attitudes to cooperate with their colleagues could also reflect LCC5 as it dealt with collectivism (G. H. Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Leung & Chan, 2003; Triandis, 1995) rooted with individual freedom. The responses that emerged from Australian Business respondents addressing LCC4, reported that much of the employee’s individual input into decision making was attributed directly to the organisational learning, which could also reflect LCC5 as it dealt with having the freedom to participate in the shared decision making process (Osborne & Gaebler, 1994; Senge, 1990).

In this study the data demonstrated that both Australian and Chinese Business cohorts were less inclined to have negative comments about their sense of freedom in their workplaces. Both Chinese and Australian Business respondents

perceived a learning environment that allowed every employee to have freedom in learning and sharing their knowledge. Australian Business respondents, for example, reported an example in what they called ‘change management community’ where people working in the Finance, Retail, or Corporate areas “come together and meet regularly to ensure consistency between the change management function” (F1, BUS, AU, 1, 15/06). A Chinese Business respondent also reported they were “working on a project, and our team leader provided us with support and guided us all the way. We felt free to share ideas with all the team members” (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10).

Evidence from the Business employees in this study supported the work of Senge (1990) in relation to building the community of learning in organisations, that is, “where collective aspiration is set free” (p. 3), which implies the value of freedom in collective input. Senge (1990) argued that learning organisations are localised organisations (pp. 287-301) and further used the term “localness” to indicate that employees’ commitments are required to be unleashed “by giving them the freedom to act, to try out their own ideas and be responsible for producing results” (p. 262).

In the positive responses from the University academic staff in relation to the LCC5, most comments specifically related to the degree of academic freedom the university academic staff had received in relation to their research. Some of the Chinese University academic staff also reported that they have freedom and flexibility to conduct their research projects; for example, one academic staff (M3, UNI, CN, 3, 18/9) stated that their project tended to be interdisciplinary. “We considered different disciplines ... we have tapped into people with different talents and different knowledge endeavouring to collaborate around common goals” (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09). Different people from different disciplines were invited to be involved in this project suggesting a freedom to empower people and to be flexible in the way they conduct their research. Some Australian academic staff reported academic freedom was given to pursue their own research interests.

For example, one academic staff member reported, “I researched in the area of my teaching but also sometimes I move out of my teaching area if something else interests me and I decided to pursue it” (M2, UNI, AU, 2, 14/10). The data reflected the practices reported in Samaras, Adams-Legge et al.,’s research (2008) where freedom was encouraged in their learning community activities.

In the negative responses in relation to the LCC5, some participants from the Chinese University reported a lack of freedom in shared decision making as previously reported in LCC4. For example, one academic staff member reported “we are supposed to be given the right to say something ... but actually they don’t, as they are afraid and wouldn’t dare offend the higher level” (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9). This comment lends support to Den Hartog and her colleagues’ (1999) suggestion that there were less negative views expressed towards leadership in high power distance cultures. Less critique in high power distance culture societies may be interpreted to mean that subordinates’ voices were perceived as not being heard in the decision making process.

As reported in Chapter 4, those participants from the Australian University also reported some equivocation about their input, for example, “seems to have a lot of shared opinion going in to it, but how the voices are interpreted and how the voices gets reported, I am not sure”. While freedom – and autonomy – to exercise shared decision making increased interest within their university, the degree to which the acceptability of their voices mattered to their participation (Senge, 2006). Participants “actually have the same degree of freedom too, and just don’t use it ... a lot of other people don’t grab hold of this freedom they actually have” (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10). The findings extended the view that, even though the value of freedom to participate in shared decision making was important to Australian academic staff, the freedom was operationalised as a freedom of ‘participative openness’ (Senge, 2006) in the involvement of decision making, not as being equated with ‘freedom of local autonomy’ (Senge, 2006) that focused upon increased individual accountability to the empowered authority. The

impetus to ensure practitioners' freedom and autonomy in their workplaces was externally rather than internally motivated. This finding linked to the previously reported data on the view of "[the university] has become a business, it now is a business" (M2, UNI, CN, 2, 18/9), it is "about attracting students from international market" (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10). Many researchers (see, for example, Birnbaum, 2000; Garvin, 1993; Kezar, 2006) have presented the difficulties for universities to be described as fully learning organisations. Likewise, the data in this study suggested that university participants from both Australia and China perceived a strong economy-focused orientation in their universities that now run in a "business-like fashion" (Nelson, 2003, p. 15). Freedom and autonomy were perhaps supported based upon the extrinsic motivation of members in a 'commercial university environment' (Harman, 2005), rather than through intrinsic motivation of people who desired to learn and share their practices as learning communities (Islam, 2008; Wenger et al., 2002).

The university participants who reported their freedom was predicated on business-like performance improvement also reported that they were under the constant external pressure which prevented them from operating freely. Concerns were expressed, for example, that academic freedom was being reduced by the introduction of more prescriptive requirements targeted on the School performance interests; rather than out of their personal needs and own academic interests. As an Australian academic staff reported:

Although, things like the RQF framework they were trying to put up last year or the year before, and now the ERA list they are currently engaged in, it's becoming more prescriptive in Schools trying to funnel their efforts, you have to aim for these journals, because they are of a higher ranking and those sorts of things, so that tends to reduce the freedom that you have, because there is an external pressure placed on you to focus (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

The data raised concerns that can be related to academics' work, workloads and time pressure. These have been identified in the literature in the contemporary

Australian context (Gardner & Williamson, 2004; Williamson & Myhill, 2008); the Chinese context (Cheng, 2010; Ge et al., 2011) and also reported in the extant international literature (see, for example, Deem & Lucas, 2007). Research on academics' workload, seen in the studies of Galton and his colleagues (2002) and Williamson and Myhill (2008) employed the notion of 'work intensification' to describe academics who tended to be under more pressure and more workload within less time. Gardner and Williamson (2004) also reported this particular change at the school level where teachers reported they had less time to work on what they saw as main goals of education. This was evidenced in the data from a university-level Australian academic staff who commented on the benefit of participation in conferences in response to LCC3, and reported that "... I haven't been going again recently because I have just been too busy" (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10). It became a challenge for university academics to exercise 'freedom' in the context of an excessive academic workload.

The university academic staff concerns from this study predicted a negative correlation between individual academics and the institutional demands placed upon them, demonstrating the commercial values of the universities, and the shifting role of academic staff in this change (Churchman, 2006). This has been defined as "schisms in academic identity" in higher education (Szekeres, 2006; Winter, 2009; Winter & Sarros, 2002), "a simultaneous blurring of boundaries" (Krause, 2009, p. 413), an uneven conflict between "the entrepreneurial orientation" and "the academic calling" in contemporary universities (Hakala, 2009, p. 173), and "a general increase in and diversification of the forms of control exercised over academics" (Musselin, 2007, p. 5). The growth of workload can be a threat to academic freedom, and needs to be limited in order to make a learning community possible.

LCC6: Proximity and Mutual Engagement

In this study, three items were designed to reflect Criterion Six (LCC6), among which, two of them dealt with mutual engagement ('The university/my company

provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement’; ‘The university/my company gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others’). The third item dealing with personal relations was also included in this criterion as closer proximity (‘I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes’).

As indicated in Chapter 4, the examination of significant differences between Australian and Chinese respondents for each of the LCC6 items showed that the two Chinese institutions were higher in Items 22 and 23 which reflect mutual engagement (total $M = 4.75$ and 4.58 , respectively). The two Australian institutions were lower on these two items with total means of 3.93 and 3.79 , respectively. The Chinese institutions were also high in Item 25, which reflect relations of proximity ($M = 4.45$), whereas the Australian institutions were lower on this Item ($M = 3.83$). The statistical results from this study demonstrated the degree to which Australian and Chinese respondents had significantly different perceptions on the composite items of LCC6.

However, the interview data captured some of the relationships between mutual engagement and sense of belonging in the two cultures; for example, the Chinese reported a commitment to contribute actively to their work community. As one participant commented:

[CU] is a good university with no doubt that is growing continually year after year. I love what I’m doing right now and I have a sense of dedication to this university where I have been spending the majority of my life (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/9).

This corresponded to Wenger’s (1998) findings that mutual engagement, a significant tenet of a situated learning community, defines the community practice, and underscores a sense of belonging and being an active learning community member: “being included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community’s practice, just as engagement is what defines belonging” (p. 74).

Another issue related to mutual engagement was noted by the Australian academic staff member who commented on the significance of proximity and personal contact; for example, “we’ve got a new professor at the moment... she’s already taken me out to lunch one time and explained to me what I should be doing to further my career” (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10). This was commented on positively as demonstrating concern for colleagues and “sort of filters-up and to some extent I suppose that’s what the senior academics role is to ... sort of foster the research environment” (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10). This is similar to Wenger, McDermott & Snyder’s (2002) description of Tangible and Intangible Value where learning the community created outcomes, “such as the relationships they build among people, the sense of belonging they create” (p. 15).

Although geographical distance might hinder the potential personal relations, the data did not fully accord with those reported in the literature, that is, that physical isolation can be a real barrier to collaboration among teachers (Newmann, 1994). For example, one Australian academic staff member reported:

I’ve got family and a lot of friends here ... [Local state] is sort of an isolated place, but I never feel that isolated ... [by internet connection, emails and attending conferences] I feel like I am part of an in-group of economists of Australia (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10);

Our School has 22 academics, the Faculty has 80, you’re going to find someone you can talk to, I’ve never felt isolated or alone, if anything, its probably the other way, sometimes its hard to get some free time, because everybody wants to come and talk to you all the time (M3, UNI, AU, 3, 14/10).

The data further showed conscious efforts to build a sense of ownership. This is similar to I. Mitchell and J. Mitchell (2008) who emphasised the value of reciprocal engagement to reduce feelings of isolation. As the Australian academic staff reported:

One of the staff members up in [local city] ... we have already invited her down and made sure we took her out for lunch and she came and had a chat with me and her family, we got some of her research interest areas and I will try and probably work with her on her research project and try and bring her into the fold (M5, UNI, AU, 5, 14/10).

This is consistent with the views of Wenger (1998) that

Neither is geographical proximity sufficient to develop a practice. Of course, mutual engagement requires interactions, and geographical proximity can help. But it is not because claims processors work in the same office that they form a community of practice. It is because they sustain dense relations of mutual engagement organized around what they are there to do (p. 74).

Similarly, as reported in LCC4, the Chinese Business employees' data also showed that the social and 'power' distance between them and their leadership group are being shortened by such as activities as "Lunch Interaction Day". The data not only demonstrated an accessible senior manager, but also how the employees, who were lower ranked in their organisation (such as novice employees), could be invited to fully participate in discussion which "ranged over many topics" (F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10). That is, those who had experiences of "Lunch Interaction Day" also had opportunities to learn by engaging with core organisational members in their working environment, supporting the concept of "legitimate peripheral learning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

To what extent do the operationalised criteria fit stakeholders' perceptions?

This study found that stakeholders were very competent in presenting perceptions of what constitutes a learning community, in response to the six-constructs of LCC operationalised from the literature.

Appendix L showed stakeholders' perceptions of their sense of a learning community yielded a four-factor solution, which to some extent, substantiates the six LCCs operationalised from the literature. By examining the contributing LCC variables, the results of the analysis demonstrated the differences and close fits which were evident between the six LCCs and four factors; in other words, between what the literature described as key constituent attributes of a learning community and what the survey respondents from this study actually perceived them to be.

LCC1 and LCC2 predominantly loaded on factor one, suggesting that the survey respondents treated contributing items to LCC1 and LCC2 as a cohesive construct rather than as distinct or fragmented parts of each other. The results of the analysis of interview data confirmed this finding from the questionnaires. For example, the respondent (M2, BUS, AU, 3, 16/06) reported that "... to have the mission ... you've got to be very good ... at what you do ... you need to learn all the time ... everyone is aligned behind that ... because we have a common purpose". The interview data along with other data reported earlier in Chapter 4 revealed that those stakeholders whose perceptions were more positive about their organisational development (factor one) tended to be more willing to argue for an understanding of what their organisational mission, vision, values and goals were (LCC1), and this was associated with the organisation's continuing learning commitment (LCC2). Those who had limited or tentative knowledge to translate their organisational mission and vision statement reported a greater level of difficulty in their organisations in achieving the stated mission, vision, values and goals. For example, an Australian respondent (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10) reported their knowledge of mission and vision statements that was equivocal, as the opposite of LCC1: "I have never read it. Yes, that's why I said it is not clear". When the respondent was told what the official statement were about, he commented on LCC2 by reporting a mismatch between what the stated statement was and the challenge to each individual to align with the statement's rhetoric:

My philosophy on ... is maybe a little mismatched sometimes ... I mean that the rhetoric of that statement is fine until it meets the bureaucracy and the bureaucracy ... is what stops the university from being able to be small and nimble to go about... you know, faculty saying 'let's do this' ... some people like change, some people don't like change ... There are more people in the university who wants things to stay the same than there are people who want it to change (M1, UNI, AU, 1, 14/10).

In this study the data demonstrated that LCC1 was developed typically in concert with the development of LCC2. As knowledge of organisational mission, vision, values and goals was shared, stakeholders tended to be uniformly committed to the organisation's continuous development, and as they engaged in: continuous inquiry (Hord, 1997; Huffman, 2003; Stoll et al., 2006; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004), continuous improvement (Reichstetter, 2006), an ongoing cycle of learning process (DuFour, 2009; DuFour et al., 2010), e.g., "a process of gradual learning; not just to learn how [they] continue development in itself, but also to find the way in which everyone can contribute to continuous improvement" (F1, UNI, CN, 4, 18/09), and consequently, a stronger sense of commitment was cultivated to support and communicate shared mission, vision, values and goals, enabling a sense of learning community in their workplaces.

In addition, LCC3 loaded on factor two, suggesting that survey respondents viewed a collegial environment as the basis for contributing to Collaborative Culture and Collective Inquiry. The interview data also indicated, as described earlier, instances of collaboration; e.g., the respondent (M1, UNI, CN, 1, 02/09) reported a cross-functional collegial team made up of staff from different schools and their endeavours to collaborate around common goals. The analysis of the LCC3 interview data revealed that the higher a sense of collegial atmosphere the respondents perceived the more conducive the learning community was seen to facilitate working collaboratively to reach desired outcomes.

On the other hand, LCC4 loaded on factor three, suggesting that the items contributing to LCC4 in the survey instrument consistently reflected a measure of the extent to which leadership and authority was explicitly targeted as an aspect of the perceptions of the survey participants.

The survey-questionnaire data also indicated that LCC5 and LCC6 loaded on factor four. The data from the study suggested that either LCC5 or LCC6 was not independent of each other and both of them were treated as constructive behaviour that stakeholders perceived as freedom to act (see, for example, M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06); freedom to participate (see, for example, F1, BUS, CN, 1, 26/10), personal affiliation (see, for example, F2, BUS, CN, 2, 26/10), and mutual engagement (see, for example, M1, BUS, AU, 2, 15/06), demonstrating how participants in this study were given “exposure to actual practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 100) in a practice-oriented learning community (Fox, 2000; Islam, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002; Wenger et al., 2009).

Suggestions for Further Research

This study with its exploratory nature provides preliminary results of four comparative empirical case studies examining stakeholders’ perceptions, including: how employees, in two University academic departments and two Business organisations, perceive their work; how they value their work context as a learning community; and how they construct meaning about team work, common tasks, sharing and flexibility of role relationships.

Considering the timeframe and limitations of the study that have been outlined at the beginning of this thesis, there are a number of suggestions pointing towards the limitations of this study, for potential future follow-up studies and for practice. These suggestions are described under:

- Suggestions for methodological considerations,
- Suggestions to address the knowledge-gap with research, and

- Suggestions for future practice.

Suggestions for Methodological Considerations

This study challenged the traditional methodological grounds previously employed in simple comparative research by applying an innovative cross-cultural and interdisciplinary methodological approach to the design. While the design of this study attempted to fill this gap by treating both culture and discipline as variables, it was subject to the following methodological concerns that need to be considered and extended for further study.

This study concerned a small population consisting of a selected number of academic and business employees as noted in Chapter 1, which may not generalise to all stakeholders in the four case organisations or beyond. There needs to be more research utilising a greater number of participants to extend understanding of the subject. This research study provided a basis for further research into the recruitment limitation on which the selection of sampling was confined by the ‘Opportunity’ and ‘purposeful’ sampling methods.

It is suggested that this study be conducted with larger sample sizes selected by the random sampling method to increase confidence in the generalisability of the findings of the present research.

In addition, the issue of cross-cultural measurement equivalence is real as there may be language subtlety that necessitates caution when considering the findings. The translation equivalence of meanings of the research instrument was essential, and very often, cross-cultural researchers tend to disregard this issue, which could threaten the validity of the research. In the same vein, interdisciplinary measurement equivalence between different domains also may have occurred. The research instruments employed in this study were therefore subject to double translations linguistically and contextually.

It is suggested that further consideration be given to increase the validity and, therefore, more confidence in the equivalence of instruments. In a subsequent study the use of Rasch or Item Response Theory (IRT) analysis to further test for the attempt of instruments' equivalence might enable more rigorous analysis.

Suggestions to Address the Knowledge-gap with Research

The existing learning community literature, reflected little evidence of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparative research, or of the empirical findings drawn from them. Although cross-cultural research across a wide domain has increased substantially, these studies, as described in Chapter 1, have been applied the idea of the learning community in practice in different contexts, and as described in Chapter 2, the concept of the learning community has been operationalised in terms of various concepts and theories; however, they have not provided both cross-cultural and interdisciplinary lenses to enable identification of core common values and knowledge bases of learning communities among groups in different organisations across cultural settings.

It is suggested that future studies be sought to eliminate this knowledge-gap by adopting processes used in this study, particularly to examine the perceived common values of a learning community obtained from the literature in a range of organisations across several other cultures. The identification of common values provides a basis on which further cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research on learning communities could occur, which may further validate the initial six LCCs that have been used as a universal learning community conceptual framework in the present study.

This study not only moved beyond the identification of six LCCs operationalised from the literature as key constituent attributes of a learning community but also examined the underlying mechanisms of the participants' own perceptions compared with the literature-defined six constructs of LCC. The obtained four factor structure of the target phenomenon was significant for the understanding of

how the stakeholders' reports of learning community criteria make sense of literature and, therefore, significant for researchers in education, business management or, more generally.

It is suggested that further research be carried out in organisations other than educational and business organisations and in countries other than Australia and China where similar perceptions of stakeholders' work lives were explored to ascertain whether the four underlying learning community factors perceived by Australian and Chinese practitioners are evident also in other contexts.

Suggestions for Future Practice

The findings of this study hold implications for future policy development pertaining to organisational management. The criteria of inspiring shared mission, vision, values and goals (LCC1) and demonstrating commitment to continuous improvement (LCC2) require willingness to value and act beyond each individual's work in order to give rise to the growth of other members in the organisation. Based upon this study, both university academics and business employees across cultures have the capacity, if not yet the willingness, to value collaboration and collective enquiry, and use this criterion to create consistent and improved learning experiences in their organisations. This implies that both academic and business cohorts in their work situation must act in ways that not only value the mission, vision, values and goals of their university/business, but hold other colleagues accountable to the organisation's continuous improvement commitment.

It is therefore suggested that, for the university and business administrators, further consideration be given to the crucial use of 'scaffolding' to develop learning communities in which individuals either in the university or business can be provided with incentives to participate in the creation of shared organisational mission, vision, values and goals (LCC1), commit themselves to continuous improvement (LCC2), honour collaborative and collective attainments (LCC3),

and exercise freedom (LCC5) and decision making through their mutual engagement (LCC6). All of these practices in turn reflect supportive and shared leadership practice (LCC4) as described in the study and that needs to be taken for granted by members. This is necessary if administrators wish their respective organisations to become authentic learning communities.

It is expected that what has been identified in this study will assist in understanding the dynamics underpinning the specific institutions that participated in this study. Outcomes might also yield further insights beyond the study itself and be equally appropriate for other institutions and/or generalised with some confidence to other national or international contexts.

Summary of Chapter 5

To draw this thesis to its conclusion this chapter addressed to the overarching research aim of this study by presenting the findings of the contributing Research Questions which were examined in turn with the discussions from data analysis and suggestions for further studies and practice.

This study is unique, in that it has considered the practice of learning communities and employed a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary simple two-by-two case study design to examine the stakeholders' perceptions of 'learning community' in the context of University faculties and Business departments in Australia and China.

The findings of this study offered significant insight into how stakeholders perceive six criteria of a successful learning community that were synthesised and operationalised from the extant literature on learning community and other related knowledge base. These criteria were

- i) the perceptions of shared mission, vision, values and goals;
- ii) the demonstration of commitment to continuous improvement;

- iii) initiatives that develop and sustain a collaborative culture and collective enquiry;
- iv) feelings of supportive and shared leadership;
- v) perceived freedom of group membership; and
- vi) the descriptions of proximity and mutual engagement.

The extent of the stakeholders' perceptions was of considerable empirical significance, both in terms of the level of observed statistical significance, and in terms of the assertions that stakeholders made in the construction of their meaning making. The role of national culture, reflecting historic-socio-political influences, was central in understanding respondents' perceptions of the six constituent elements of learning community listed above. On the other hand, there were cross-cultural and interdisciplinary similarities in the way stakeholders reported their perceptions of their working environment as a learning community which reflected many interconnected issues inherent in the data. The consensus that was reached across the cases in this study, were

- i) development perceptions;
- ii) collegial environment;
- iii) leadership and authority; and
- iv) constructive practice.

Stakeholders' perceptions linked closely with what the literature suggested as six constituent attributes of a learning community; however, the data show a more nuanced understanding of a learning community based on their own lived professional experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Definitions of Communities as proposed by Various Researchers

A summary of definitions of communities as proposed by various researchers

Researcher	Definition	Key elements
Hawley (1950, p. 180)	“Formally defined, community refers to the structure of relationships through which a localized population provides its daily requirements ... It is, in fact, the least reducible universe within which ecological phenomena may be adequately observed ... The community, then, is the basic unit of ecological investigation”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure of relations • localised population • reducible universe • basic unit
Parsons (1951, p. 91)	“A community is that collectivity the members of which share a common territorial area as that base of operations for daily activities”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collectivity • share common area
Sussman (1959, pp. 1-2)	“A community is said to exist, when interaction between individuals has the purpose of meeting individual needs & obtaining group goals ... the features of social interaction, structures for the gratification of physical, social and psychological needs & limited geographical area, are basic to the definition of community”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction between individuals • meeting needs • obtaining group goals • social interaction
Sutton & Kolaja (as cited in Bell & Newby, 1971, p. 31)	“Community is a number of families residing in a relatively small area within which they have developed a more or less complete socio-cultural definitions imbued with collective identifications and by means of which they resolve problems arising from the sharing of an area”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop socio-cultural definitions • collective identifications • resolve problems • sharing of an area
Martin (1970, pp. 302-303)	“The collectivity of people who occupy a common territory, share a common life and interact within a common set of institutions”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collectivity of people • common territory • share a common life • share interact • a set of institutions
Bender (1978, p. 7)	“A network of social relations marked by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a network

Researcher	Definition	Key elements
	mutuality and emotional bonds”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social relations • mutuality and emotional bonds
Cohen (1985, p. 19)	“Repositories of symbols” or human “mental constructs”, where “people attach meaning to it and make it a referent of their identity”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repositories of symbols • mental constructs • referent of their identity
McMillan & Chavis (1986, p. 9)	“Members have a belonging, members matter to one another and to the group and a shared faith that member's needs will be met through their commitment to be together”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belonging • matter to each other • shared faith • commitment together
Stebbins (1986, p. 534)	“Community is a social group with a common territorial base; those in the group share interests and have a sense of belonging to the group”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social group • common territorial base • share interests • sense of belonging
Shaffer & Anundsen (1993, p. 10)	“Community is a dynamic whole that emerges when a group of people participate in common practices; depend upon one another; make decisions together; identify themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships; and commit themselves for the long term to their own, one another's and the group's well-being”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dynamic whole • share common practices • make decisions mutually • collectivism • long term commitment
Rapport (1996, pp. 114-115)	“A group of people residing in the same bounded locality, who share common interests and social structures”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group of people • same bounded locality • share common interests • share social structures
Kim (2000, p. 28)	“A community is a group of people with a shared interest, purpose or goal, who get to know each other better over time”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • group of people • share interest, purpose or goal • know each other

Researcher	Definition	Key elements
		better over time
Brint (2001, p. 8)	“Communities are aggregates of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together principally by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and/or personal concern (i.e., interest in the personalities and life events of one another)”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aggregates of people • common activities • common beliefs • bound by relations
Riel & Polin (2004, p. 18)	“A multigenerational group of people, at work or play, whose identities are defined in large part by the roles they play and relationships they share in that group activity”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • groups of people • define identities • play roles • share relationships
Marshall & Berg (2006, pp. 28-29)	“Communities represent groups of individuals with collective interests, a common identity, or a shared history”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • groups of individuals • collective interests • common identity • shared history
Samah & Aref (2011, p. 187)	“A social unit where the locality in which they reside is an integral part; within which members interact together to do things and to achieve what they want”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • people • area • interaction • interest

Appendix B Example of Survey-questionnaire Instruments

Appendix B1 Survey-questionnaire Guideline

Appendix B2 Final Survey-questionnaire for University

Appendix B3 Final Survey-questionnaire for Business

Appendix B1 Survey-questionnaire Guideline

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

**Unlocking the Potential of Learning Communities in Academic and Business Contexts:
Australian and Chinese Case Studies**

Dear [organisation] staff,

This instruction sheet is designed to help you to complete the enclosed questionnaire. Please read the following instructions carefully prior to filling out this survey questionnaire.

To begin: please make sure you have

1. Read and understood the Consent Form for this study; and
2. Signed and dated the Agreement on the Consent Form as approval of participation in the study.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

The questionnaire consists of four pages and should take approximately thirty minutes to complete. Please complete the questionnaire using a blue or black ink pen.

NOTE THE FOLLOWING

In most cases you will only have to tick one box but please read the questions carefully as sometimes you will need to write in your answer in the appropriate spaces, or some questions consist of a series of statements on which you are asked to give your opinion. Please read the statements, and rate the level of your agreement for each. Each response item has five-point categories ranging from the left-hand side of the scale 'strongly agree' to the right-hand side of the scale 'strongly disagree'. The five alternatives are:

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SUBMISSION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Once you have completed the questionnaire, please put your completed questionnaire into the self-addressed envelope supplied and return it by **Friday, 14th May, 2010**.

Note: If you are willing to participate in an interview to inform us more fully about your views on this research study, please sign and date the Agreement on the Consent Form as approval of a face-to-face interview participation, and detail your preferred contact method.

Thank you for your time in participating in this questionnaire. We are grateful for your cooperation.

Best wishes

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Appendix B2 Survey-questionnaire for University

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACADEMICS

Please answer the following questions which provide some biographical data about you. Please tick or select the description below that best describes yourself, and/or type in the response in the appropriate spaces.

1. Gender:

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. Age in years:

Please Insert Text Here

3. What is your country of permanent residence?

Please Insert Text Here

4. What was the level of your highest qualification?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor degree (not honours or graduate entry) | <input type="checkbox"/> Master degree by research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor degree (honours) | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate by coursework |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate certificate | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate by research |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate/postgraduate diploma | <input type="checkbox"/> Other award course |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Master degree by coursework | |

5. What is your position regarding paid work?

☐ Academic staff ☐ Faculty support member

6. Are you employed full time or part time?

☐ Working full time ☐ Working part time

7. Please name the faculty/school you work for.

Please Insert Text Here

8. How long have you been employed at this university?

Please Insert Text Here

Please tell us about your views about your work environment at the university.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with the university work context?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you understand the vision and mission of the university?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Would you say that your university prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Would you say classifying some staff as 'excellent' is used to encourage others' motivation in my university?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. How much do you agree that academics are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Do academics see their seniors as figures of authority?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Do you agree that academics are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the university?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A university pursues excellence in teaching and research and it is seen as a learning community. Please rank what criteria you perceive important to a learning community.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. My university is a learning community where	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

goals are organizational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.					
13. Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. The ways in which university members work and learn together are crucial to the development of university community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Faculty and administrators guide staff towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Learning is a natural process and my university provides opportunities to facilitate it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us about your views about your work, and to what extent do you perceive as if you are a part of the university learning community? Please tick the most appropriate options for each statement to describe which you consider of significance and value to you.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. My university has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. My university is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. My university community is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. My university provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. My university gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

28. I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. I agree that commitment is part of our university identity as a community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. In my work, the university has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university community are engaged.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thanks for your time and co-operation in completing this survey.

*Appendix B3 Survey-questionnaire for Business***QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BUSINESS**

Please answer the following questions which provide some biographical data about you. Please tick or select the description below that best describes yourself, and/or type in the response in the appropriate spaces.

1. Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. Age in years:

Please Insert Text Here

3. What is your country of permanent residence?

Please Insert Text Here

4. What was the level of your highest qualification?

☐ Bachelor degree

☐ Master degree

☐ Doctorate degree

☐ Others

5. What is your position regarding paid work?

☐ Manager

☐ General staff

6. Which one of the following best describes the type of employment in your main paid work?

☐ Permanent or open-ended contract

☐ Fixed-term contract more than 12 months

☐ Fixed-term contract up to 12 months

7. What are the main tasks or duties in your job?

Describe as fully as possible. For example: AUDITING AS A MEMBER OF AN AUDIT TEAM

Please Insert Text Here

8. How long have you worked with this company?

Please Insert Text Here

Please tell us about your views about your work environment in your company.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with your work context?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you understand the vision and mission of the company?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the company?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Would you say that your company prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Would you say classifying some staff as 'excellent' is used to encourage others' motivation in my company?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. How much do you agree that employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my company?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Do employees see their seniors as figures of authority?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Do you agree that employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the company?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A university pursues excellence in teaching and research and it is seen as a learning community. Please rank what criteria you perceive important to a learning community.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. My company is a learning community where goals are organizational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. My company's goals should be established by the governing body of the company	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. The ways in which university members work and learn together are crucial to the development of business community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. A administrators and executive officers guide staff towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Learning is a natural process and my company provides opportunities to facilitate it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. My company requires employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us about your views about your work, and to what extent do you perceive as if you are a part of the university learning community? Please tick the most appropriate options for each statement to describe which you consider of significance and value to you.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. My company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. My company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22. My company community is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. My company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24. My company gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. I am able to think critically from new	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.					
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. I agree that commitment is part of our company identity as a community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. In my work, the company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the business community are engaged.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thanks for your time and co-operation in completing this survey.

Appendix C Example of Interview Schedules

Unlocking the Potential of Learning Communities in Academic and Business
Contexts: Australian and Chinese Case Studies

Interview Schedule: [organisation]

1. How long have you worked at [organisation]?
Can you describe briefly your role in [organisation]?
2. Do you know the mission of company?
Does this mission statement resonate with or seem to express the aspects you see as central to what should be the company's mission?
3. Is [organisation] engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement?
Could you please give an example that demonstrates a commitment to the cycle of Planning, Implementing, Data Gathering, Reflection, and then another cycle of the same activities within your department or the company?
4. In your daily work, do you interact extensively with or discuss work issues with colleagues?

If the answer is 'yes', then probe:

(a) In light of your answer above, is there someone from a different culture or different from you in terms of knowledge or background?

(b) Do you think the interaction with different people from various backgrounds has been beneficial to your work? Could you please explain in what way you feel this has an influence on your work?
5. Is there a process for shared decision making in your department? And, the whole [organisation]?
Would more shared decision making be possible if the leadership, power or authority was shared?
6. Are you generally satisfied with your work environment?
Does your work environment facilitate feelings of belonging to your department or [organisation]?
7. How much freedom do you have in your work context in deciding the broad strategies your department should take?

Is there any sort of learning community existing where members share knowledge and participate freely based on equality?

How competitive is your job?

8. How closely do you work with your colleagues when you perform your job?
Do you trust your peers' critical feedback and respect their opinion of your work?
Do you think your work community reduces any feelings of isolation in completing your work?
Can you discuss with your colleagues any negative feelings you might have regarding your work place?
9. How does your answer to the question about a learning community fit with the mission of the [organisation]?
10. What factors do you think contributed to the development of a learning community in your department or the [organisation] over the past couple of years?

Appendix D Ethics Approval

MEMORANDUM

Private Bag 01 Hobart
Tasmania 7001 Australia
Telephone (03) 6226 2764
Facsimile (03) 6226 7148
Marilyn.Knott@utas.edu.au
<http://www.research.utas.edu.au/index.htm>



HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL

6 August 2008

Professor John Williamson
Education
Private Bag 1307
Launceston

Ethics reference: H10176

'Unlocking the potential of learning communities in Academic and Business contexts: Australian and Chinese case studies'.

PhD candidate: Mr Yang Yang

Dear Professor Williamson

Acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 30 July 2008.

All committees operating under the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network are registered and required to comply with the *National Statement on the Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans 1999* (NHMRC guidelines).

Therefore, the Chief Investigator's responsibility is to ensure that:

- 1) All researchers listed on the application comply with HREC approved application.
- 2) Modifications to the application do not proceed until approval is obtained in writing from the HREC.
- 3) The confidentiality and anonymity of all research subjects is maintained at all times, except as required by law.
- 4) Clause 2.37 of the National Statement states:
An HREC shall, as a condition of approval of each protocol, require that researchers immediately report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval of the protocol, including:
 - a) *Serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;*
 - b) *Proposed changes in the application; and*
 - c) *Unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.*

The report must be lodged within 24 hours of the event to the Ethics Executive Officer who will report to the Chairs.

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- 5) All participants must be provided with the current Information Sheet and Consent form as approved by the Ethics Committee.
- 6) The Committee is notified if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.
- 7) This study has approval for four years contingent upon annual review. An *Annual Report* is to be provided on the anniversary date of your approval. Your first report is due [12 months from 'Ethics Committee Approval' date]. You will be sent a courtesy reminder by email closer to this due date.
Clause 2.35 of the National Statement states:
As a minimum an HREC must require at regular periods, at least annually, reports from principal researchers on matters including:
 - a) *Progress to date or outcome in case of completed research;*
 - b) *Maintenance and security of records;*
 - c) *Compliance with the approved protocol, and*
 - d) *Compliance with any conditions of approval.*
- 8) A *Final Report* and a copy of the published material, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of project.

Yours sincerely

A. Knott

for Ethics Executive Officer

Appendix E Example of Invitation Letter for the Survey

27 April 2010

Dr (First name) (Surname)
CEO, (Australian Business)
GPO Box (Number)
HOBART TASMANIA 7001

Dear Dr (Surname),

My name is Yang Yang. I am undertaking my PhD in the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, under the supervision of Prof John Williamson. Based on the conversation between yourself and Prof John Williamson, I would like to express heartfelt gratitude for you agreeing to participate in my study.

With regards to the study, please find attached ten copies of the following: Questionnaires, Information Sheets, Consent Forms and self-addressed return envelopes, these are bundled into separate packs of material.

May I please ask you to distribute the material to each of your colleagues willing to participate in the study?

Following completion of the questionnaire, may I ask you and them to return it to me in the self-addressed envelope? Given my agreed time-line for this phase of the data collection, may I request return of the questionnaire by (date).

Again, thank you very much for supporting my research study. Should further information about the study or the Questionnaire required, please do not hesitate to contact me at Yang.Yang@utas.edu.au

Yours sincerely

Yang Yang
PhD Candidate
Faculty of Education
University of Tasmania

Phone + 61 3 6324 3792
Email: Yang.Yang@utas.edu.au
Web: <http://www.utas.edu.au/educ>

Postal address: Locked Bag 1307, Launceston TAS 7250
Street Address: Room A008, Building A, Newnham Campus, Launceston

Appendix F Example of Information Sheet

Locked Bag 1307 Launceston
Tasmania 7250 Australia
Phone (03) 6324 3339 Fax (03) 6324 3048
Email John.Williamson@utas.edu.au
Yang.Yang@utas.edu.au



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS:

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY AND INTERVIEW

Unlocking the Potential of Learning Communities in Academic and Business Contexts: Australian and Chinese Case Studies

Dear Colleague

The following information is designed to assist you in deciding whether or not to participate in this PhD study by completing the attached questionnaire-survey, and possibly an interview. The questionnaire-survey data will be complemented by information gained from face-to-face interviews. It is anticipated that the questionnaire-survey will take approximately thirty minutes to complete, and that the interview will take about sixty minutes.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and evidenced by returning the completed questionnaire in the provided reply addressed envelope, or in the case of the interview, signing a consent form. While completing the survey-questionnaire attached, you are, of course, at liberty to omit responses to any question. Should you agree to participate in an interview for the second stage you will be asked to comment about learning communities, in particular your perceptions and your experiences of working collaboratively.

Background

There is a growing consensus about the need and significance of fostering learning communities as they seek economic, social, cultural, and educational development for their membership; therefore, they have become an important topic in organizational improvement. The concept of a learning community initially has been more closely aligned with issues of learning in the educational context; however, more recently the

development of learning community has moved into business and management also. There is an urgent need to better understand these differences, and to know more about how stakeholders perceive their role in being involved in this developmental process.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the concept of a learning community and to compare the extent to which learning communities have developed in two different cultures, Australia and China. Two different user groups which focus on the academic and the business context will be targeted as participants in this study. The goal is, first, to describe and map how stakeholders perceive their work context as a learning community, second, what criteria do stakeholders perceive essential to a learning community, and third, what factors do they perceive in either hindering or facilitating the development an evolving of a learning community.

Name of Chief Investigator

Professor John Williamson, as my supervisor, is the designated chief investigator while I will be the investigator to have direct involvement with research participants.

Payment to Subjects

Participation in this project is voluntary and I am not able to offer you any payment.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Data obtained from questionnaire surveys will be held in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office or on a password protected computer accessible only to the researchers. Survey response sheets will contain no identifying information other than an identification number. The list of numbers and corresponding names will be kept separately to the remaining data. Use of identity numbers will ensure that identification of participants does not occur. Completed questionnaires will be kept locked in the researcher's office and shredded after five years; data stored electronically will be deleted after five years. The interviews will be recorded on audio tape and transcribed to written text. Names of the participants in interviews will be used solely for the purpose of my communications with participants and inviting participants to check the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Pseudonyms will be used in all transcripts of interviews in place of the names of any participants, any mentioned third parties or any identifying location names. The same pseudonyms will be used in any analysis or reports of the research project. Interview transcripts will also be held in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and will be shredded after five years. Any computer files of interview transcripts created during the project will be password protected and will not be stored on any computers once the project has been completed. Files will be copied to CD-ROM for secure storage and destroyed five years after publication of the thesis.

Ethics Approval and Contacts

The research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Tasmania) Network, which is constituted under the National Health & Medical Research Council. Any concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the project is conducted may be referred to the Executive Officer of the Network (Ph: 03 6226 7479; email: Human.Ethics@utas.edu.au).

Freedom to Refuse or Withdraw

Your participation in this project is voluntary and evidenced by completion of the survey, or in the case of the interview, signing a consent form. You will have the opportunity later to withdraw the data because the data that we received from the questionnaire survey and interview will be identifiable by me (but NOT publicly identifiable in the final dissertation). If you decide to participate and subsequently withdraw, you can do so at any time, provided that you do so before the thesis is completed, without penalty or prejudice to your study, employment and assessment. The freedom to withdraw from the study will also include the right to modify or withdraw any or all of the data you contributed.

Information Sheet and Statement of Informed Consent

You may keep a copy of the request letter and this information sheet for your own records. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like further information. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Professor John Williamson (Ph: 03 6324 3339; email: John.Williamson@utas.edu.au).

Information Provided if Considering Further Participation As An Interviewee

If you would like to consider volunteering to participate in the second stage of this study as an interviewee, please indicate so on the consent form and I will contact you to answer any questions and to arrange a suitable time and venue for the interview.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. I hope you will be willing to participate in this study.

Prof John Williamson
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Appendix G Example of Statement of Informed Consent

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Phone (03) 6324 3339 Fax (03) 6324 3048
Email John.Williamson@utas.edu.au
Yang.Yang@utas.edu.au



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY: QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW

Unlocking the Potential of Learning Communities in Academic and Business Contexts: Australian and Chinese Case Studies

1. I have read and understood the information sheet for this study.
2. The nature and possible effects of the study have been explained to me.
3. I understand that if I agree to participate in the research project this involves the following procedures:
 - a. Completing a questionnaire that will take approximately thirty minutes;
 - b. Face-to-face interview, if I choose to;
 - c. Access to, and opportunity for, correction and elaborations of transcribed interviews
4. **Risks**

I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I am either free to decline to participate, without consequence, at any time prior to or at any point during the activity, or at liberty to withdraw if I believe there could be any discomfort or risk or sensitivity for myself or a third party. The freedom to withdraw from the study will also include the right to withdraw any data already contributed.

5. Confidentiality

I understand that, except to the extent that the research data are published in non-identifiable form, all research data will be treated as confidential. Questionnaire and interviews data will be held in a locked filing cabinet in the chief investigator's office and will be shredded after five years. Electronic records will be stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after five years.

6. Questions

Any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

7. Agreement to Publication of Research Data

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a participant.

8. Agreement to Participate in this Study

i). Agreement to participate in the Questionnaire

☐ Yes

☐ No

I agree to participate in this questionnaire survey and I understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect. If I so wish, I may request that any, or all, data I have supplied to date be withdrawn from the research.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

ii). Agreement to participate in a face-to-face interview

☐ Yes

☐ No

I agree to participate in an interview and I understand that I may withdraw at any time without any effect and, if I so wish I may request that any, or all, data I have supplied be withdrawn from the research.

Preferred method of contact about the interview

(Please provide a phone number, or email address):

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

9. Statement by Investigator

I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this participant and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of investigator Yang Yang

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Appendix H SPSS Coding of the Variables in the Survey-questionnaire

Item	SPSS coding
01. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with your work context?	01. satisfaction
02. Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?	02. mission understanding
03. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	03. multi-culture
04. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?	04. learning culture
05. Would you say that your university/company prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?	05. entrance
06. Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff? /Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?	06. competitive
07. Would you say classifying some staff as 'excellent' is used to encourage others' motivation in my university/company?	07. motivation
08. Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?	08. freedom
09. Do academics/employees see their seniors as figures of authority?	09. figures of authority
10. Do you agree that academics/employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	10. bossed around
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the university/company?	11. external-discipline
12. My university/company is a learning community and goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.	12. goals to growth
13. Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals/The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals	13. incentives aligned goals
14. The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board/My company's goals should be established by the governing body of the company	14. goals establishment
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.	15. ongoing learning

Item	SPSS coding
16. The ways in which university/staff members work and learn together are crucial to the development of university/business community.	16. significance of collaboration
17. Faculty and administrators/Executive officers guide staff/employees towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.	17. supportive leaders
18. Learning is a natural process and my university/company provides opportunities to facilitate it.	18. natural learning supported
19. My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow/my company requires employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market	19. future preparation
20. My university/company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	20. shared vision
21. My university/company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	21. reaching mission continuously
22. My university/company is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.	22. engaged ongoing improvement
23. My university/company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	23. mutual interaction encouraged
24. My university/company gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.	24. engagement encouraged
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process.	25. able to explore issues
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	26. cooperate in proximity
27. My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.	27. able to learn
28. I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.	28. able to think critically
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	29. be encouraged to work
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	30. be encouraged to learn
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	31. helped others related to work
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	32. helped others non-related work
33. I agree that commitment is part of our university/company identity as a community.	33. commitment is identity

Item	SPSS coding
34. I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	34. trust and respect colleagues
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	35. caring environment
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	36. belonging
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	37. relationships developing
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	38. opportunities to discuss issues
39. In my work, the university/company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	39. leaders support learning
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university/business community are engaged.	40. innovative knowledge produced

Appendix I Example of Interview Transcript from University Academics

Transcript of Interview

Interviewer

How long have you worked in the University?

Interviewee

I started doing tutorials in about 1996 for a couple of years and then started lecturing, I think in ... doing lecturing in the summer school in about, I am guessing sort of really, about 98 and then I think in 99 I had a contract as a lecturer and I was a contract lecturer for a few years and then I got a ... then I applied for a position at about ... I think I applied for a (proper) position as a tenured position in 2002 so I've been tenured for, what's that 7 years and before that I had a about 3 or 4 years of contact lecturing and a couple of years of tutoring before that.

Interviewer

Could you describe briefly your role in the University?

Interviewee

Yep sure, well I suppose teaching-wise I mainly teach micro-economics and econometrics and I mainly seem to look at these days I teach second years and third years and the Honours students. Lately I've just been teaching the third years and Honours students I suppose. Research-wise I do research into household behaviour and various different household decisions about having children and the effects that different demographic structures in the household have on demand and anything else that my Honours students and PhD students are looking at. I end up getting into those and investigating that, so some of the things to do with education and education choices and things like that, so that is

sort of the research side of things. Administration-wise I do whatever I suppose they tell me to do, which lately has been ... I normally coordinate the school daily report, being the senior coordinator for economics analysis major for several years, and at the moment I'm the course coordinator for the Bachelor of Economics because the course coordinator is on leave at the moment, I'm not too sure whether I have got the job permanently or not. I normally organise the Economics Challenge which is an event for year 11 and 12 students, trying to encourage them to come and study Economics here at the University of ... and then community-wise I do most of my role in that way I'm the President of the Economic Society of ..., the ... Branch so I do a lot of, I do a bit of work with them in setting events and coordinating certain things. I also do radio interviews. I haven't done that many lately but I normally do two or three a year on average and I do have a little bit of contact with the people (the reporter) the (local newspaper) and occasionally give him some little bits of information if he is after for it.

Interviewer

Do you know the Mission of the University?

Interviewee

Not really off by heart, no. Each agenda item, I remember that's at one stage but I can't really remember what they all stand for; engagement, diversity, growth. I forgot what the two E's stand for excellence and ...

Interviewer

Does the Mission statements resonate with or seem to express the aspects you see as central to what should be the University or Faculty's mission? [After the University and Faculty mission statements was described to the interviewee.]

Interviewee

Yeah, the Faculty one mentally aligns, I think, mainly with what we are doing, we're pretty (now) engaged with mostly business community because I'm an economist that's more of a government committee that we normally relate to more so, because Economics is not usually a government policy to a lesser extent in business but I have a few contacts in business. But I'm a ... I meet with the Treasury, people from Treasury quite a bit and help them out and do a few consultations for them. The 'Excellence-wise', well the staff are very good, we are sometimes hampered by poor conditions, well there used to be excessive workloads, it's improved a lot in our School recently and also we struggled a little bit with the facilities more than anything. Just the lack of room, not enough tutorial rooms, not enough appropriate teaching spaces ... not enough computer labs, no teaching space in the computer labs. A lot of those things are beyond the Faculty's control, so I feel that the Faculty is pretty well right, doing as much as it can within ... The mission statement did sound sort of familiar as did the University one I suppose. I don't feel that much attachment to the University's mission statement. The research I do is not distinctly local. Oh, some of it is, I have done some work with my PhD student on local education and I've got some local education data there and I have done a few other things on particular local topics like looking at the, the employment here and the effects on workers compensation premiums on wages on that, but mostly that type of thing normally comes through consulting, not private consulting, but consulting through the University and I've done a few sort of local flavoured things for that, so a little bit there. Yeah so, to a large, to a reasonable large extent they seem to align with what we are doing.

Interviewer

In your daily work, do you interact extensively with or discuss work issues with your colleagues?

Interviewee

Yeah, yeah every day, all the time, I check with my fellow academic staff in Economics a lot, we normally go and have coffee together and talk about our research and talk about our teaching. To a lesser extent with other Schools in the Faculty, but a little bit when we run into them. It's probably more so at Faculty dinners and things like that when I am more likely to talk to them although we try not to talk too much shop at the Faculty dinner, but especially within my own School we definitely chat a lot and just in casual conversation I suppose with some of the other Schools when I (run) in various situations but um, especially amongst the School members across the University. We have some School members up on the other campus as well and she (rarely) travels down here and so we catch up a lot and talk to her as well, so, you know quite a lot with the staff members in the School, that's for sure.

Interviewer

Is there someone from a different culture or different from you in your workplace, in terms of knowledge or background?

Interviewee

Well the staff members are all from different cultures, we've got ... who's originally a Tamil from Malaysia, he's next door, I chat to him a bit, he's in an area of Finance. We've just got some new ... well I should point out that they are all Australians, they've just got their background heritage from those countries, I think ... a resident, my supervisor was an Indian Australian, we've currently just got academic staff from ANU originally Japanese and Chinese but again I am pretty sure they are Australian as well, so they are all Australian citizens now but they came from different cultures ...

Interviewer

Do you think the interaction with different people from various backgrounds has been beneficial to your work? Could you please explain in what way you feel this has an influence on your work?

Interviewee

Yes, it is interesting to see their take on things, its more so, it's probably more important what their academic backgrounds are and that's where it really sort of matters. It's useful but it's not ... cause it is all pulling, whenever you chat to someone from a different area their always trying to pull your work out of your area into their own. And so I find it's partly useful, but you have got to take it with a grain of salt and they're always try to pull your own work into their field and you have to resist that to some extent because suddenly it's not your own work and you don't have expertise in that area anymore so you've got to take a little bit of what they say and some of it can really be quite useful, and they can point out some things that are quite useful but in the field of economics there's a wide diversity of research topics here so I learn bits from ... especially with their views into the various different types of statistical distributions whereas I normally look at some basic ones and so I can learn some things about distributions from him. ... [One colleague] who I chat to a lot, he's a theorist so I get a better idea on how to construct my models better to align with theory. I chat to [...] whose work I fellow a little bit, so yeah I'll chat to them a little bit on their different areas. There's a couple staff members that are a little bit closer to my area, although they have got different styles in their approaches but again not so much, but I don't really get that much out of. I suppose talking, to others from different disciplines. I have a little bit to do with sociologists and demographers ..., well not so much me, but via her relationship with Bruce ... when they used to do a bit of work, and that was quite interesting and it opened some ideas on how we could better look at the problem. But generally I find the more we get out of the discipline area their approach is too different, I suppose I am biased but it

seems their approach always seems very simple and basic and not detailed enough and doesn't go through enough rigorous analysis for what we are looking for and what would be acceptable I feel.

Interviewer

Is there a process for shared decision making in your Faculty?

Interviewee

Well we have, in the Faculty level, we have the Faculty forum which is monthly ... no, every second month I think they are. I used to go to them but they, early on they got bogged down in a lot of, sort of not fighting, but a lot of negative feelings, and that was under a previous Dean where relationships weren't very good amongst the Schools. We've got a much better Dean in the last few years and they work quite nicely and I been to a couple of them but, they're largely more informative rather than decision making units so I thought well, if I am just getting new information I decided not to bother. There are other avenues though for the all the various committees in the Faculty. I am on the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee at the moment, and obviously that's a decision making unit, and I give input through there. Probably the most efficient way we get decision making sort of filtered up is from our School meetings where we do all participate quite a bit and at the School meetings each sort of School representative sits on these various Faculty Committees, reports back to the School, and we provide input into that representative who then feeds it up into the Faculty committees. I don't feel like we've got much sort of participation of saying anything beyond the Faculty after that, well I suppose it's meant to feed into the Dean and the Dean is going to represent the Faculty at the Senior Management levels of the University. But I don't know, I don't get the feeling that senior management at the University sort of takes notice of what the Deans want or say. I suppose each Dean from either, all of the Faculties have got a

different agenda and so probably it's hard to get a consensus on things but definitely in the School the information brings out the ...

Interviewer

Would more shared decision making be possible if the leadership, power or authority was shared?

Interviewee

I don't really know how it could work, anyway we can't have everybody on the committees or nobody will get any work done. That's why I think that it is reasonably efficient the way they we do it at the moment by having certain representatives, I know I can talk to our School rep down the corridor because he is on the Research Committee. So if I there is something that I want to bring up with the Faculty research committee I can go to him. Similarly I hope that other people that have issues with teaching and learning come to me and I take it up to the Teaching and Learning Committee meeting. So that's the way I think it generally works, it works reasonable efficiently that way and, like I said, our School meetings work quite well and it's another way of sharing information and passing it on to those who can have an input into the decision making process. I didn't use to have that much input into the decision making process when I was younger and I was probably very glad of that. I would like to stay more out of it if I could and just concentrate on research and teaching and community work and stay out of all the committee meetings if I could.

We do do a few things via email. Sometimes we can't make a decision as our meetings are so large and sometimes we can't always get a decision or someone hasn't put enough information forward and sometimes we do then ... that information does come around via email and we read and vote on it via email occasionally. And I suppose that is one way of sort of getting out of the meeting formalities. We normally have to meet with people across the campus so we're

using the video-conferencing. Last meeting we sort of dropped out several times, we had to go back to the phones. So I suppose if there was some other way to do it, it really could you know really improve.

Interviewer

Are you generally satisfied with your work environment

Interviewee

Yeah, yes I am I think. It seems, sometimes I feel like I have got..... At some stages I am very, very busy and may probably average ten/ twelve hours a day, but then to sort of balance that out I normally make sure that at other times maybe in the summer I might only work six hours a day to sort of try to balance that out. You know I was up to 4 am marking assignments last night to try and get them done before the last class. And so ... sometimes the workload is very heavy, I do look sometimes, I have friends of mine that work in the public service, and even the private sector for that matter, and I am quite envious of their workloads being much lower than they are here at the University. But then again, then in the summer when I can take it a bit more easy, you know I've got time to focus on my research and I don't get distracted, I like that as well, although then sometimes I am very interested in the research and I work full days then as well.

Interviewer

Does your work environment facilitate feelings of belong to the School or Faculty?

Interviewee

I certainly do, probably because I have been here for so long. You know probably, there would only be about 20 percent of staff that have been here as long as I have, so I feel like I definitely belong. I moved offices once but I've ... been is

this one for a long time, so you know I definitely feel like I belong, I suppose. I'm ... writing papers and doing beautiful joint work with some of the other staff, and yeah I definitely feel like I definitely belong here. I suppose, born and breed locally as well so it seems natural that I am here to some extent. I've got family and a lot of friends here as well so I'm happy, genuinely happy to stay here, although I'll look to move at some stage, for at least a short amount of time to improve my career.

Interviewer

How much freedom do you have in your work context in, say, curriculum development, teaching approaches, assessment of students, or, in deciding the broad strategies the School or Faculty should take?

Interviewee

Down at the small level, down at teaching in curriculum of the units and the assessment strategies. I love the freedom. The Head of School looks over our unit outlines and is happy for us to try new things and they generally believe that we know the unit the best and would know best how to assess it and how and what we should be teaching in it. They might query something every now and then but generally we have got full reign to do whatever we like with teaching strategies and the learning outcomes that we want to teach the students. Same with research, you know generally we have got a lot of freedom to research what we find interesting and what we are best at.

Interviewer

Was there freedom in regards to decision making that you said?

Interviewee

Yes. Again we got that sort of mechanism where it feeds up, so we have got a fair bit of freedom and if, there's always constraints for example with School settings, the teaching program. He or she decides who's going to teach what but it is normally done in negotiation with the staff and she knows or he, sorry it is a she at the moment, our current Head of School, and she knows what our strengths are and what our areas are and so she sort of allocates those but bearing in mind that sometimes they have to change because people are on leave or staff have left or we are hiring new staff. Sometimes it is bit of a negotiation process with that sort of decision making.

Interviewer

Is there any sort of learning community existing where members share knowledge and participate freely based on equality?

Interviewee

More so at the School level, so we're swapping ideas with how we are assessing our students, or how to improve attendance in lectures or tutorials and techniques to improve that, or how to make a certain section more interesting, often bouncing ideas off one another. Less so at a Faculty level, the disciplines in Business are really quite different and we generally don't have. I just find their approach to teaching something different, well they are just two totally different things and a lot of their approaches won't work for the type of material that we teach. Someone's going to pick up the odd very small thing but um ... and I've been to things like Teaching Matters, the teaching conference, before and um, every now and then I will pick something very small that will be useful, but I haven't been going again recently because I have just been too busy, and I find that I can get better information by bouncing ideas off my colleagues or when I go to other economist conferences and talk to other economists around Australia. That's also

where I get ideas to bounce off people. So there's a community, I feel like there is a learning community within the School and there's a learning community of economists all around Australia and I sort run into ... conferences around Australia.

Interviewer

How competitive is your job?

Interviewee

Because most of us are sort of researching different areas, we're not that competitive amongst each other, most of us are happy when another staff member does well or gets success. If anything I suppose on one occasion I might think "Oh, they got a big grant, oh I didn't know it was that easy, maybe I should go and apply for a grant." And so not so much competitive but it more just highlights what money is out there for certain grants. So I don't really feel a great sense of competition because we are all in our niche areas of research to a large extent. We all understand that all our units are different so we don't really compete that much with student evaluation of teaching and learning. Some units are very difficult to teach and the students just don't like the units, a number of units of easy to teach and the students like it. So I don't think we ever compare feedback now, where we had one staff a three and a half average and another staff member got four and a half. All of the staff generally have their strengths and weaknesses and others that may not be strong as teachers are typically excellent researchers so, and we're all together, traditionally we've been a small School and there hasn't been that many teachers at the same level. Up until recently I think I was the only level B lecturer although we have just hired two or three others. So there's no-one really to sort of compare me with. I would only be looking at level C's and I wouldn't directly compare myself to them because they are a different rank. So if they were getting many more publications I'd be worried, it would slay me a little bit but I wouldn't say that we say we're competing that much.

Interviewer

Do you trust your peers' critical feedback and respect their opinion of your work?

Interviewee

Yes, yeah I do. I occasionally get them to read through things and I've got a few papers there, research papers that I've written I want to ask my colleagues to read through. Hopefully they will, I know they are very busy with their time too and I don't want to impose on them too much but um, but most of them are normally willing to help, at least to give it a bit of a read over. Just as I suppose I do for PhD students and Honours students, it sort of filters up and to some extent I suppose that's what the senior academic's role is to do, it is to sort of foster the research environment. We've got a new professor at the moment is she is really good at doing that as well, ... she's really helpful in that sense, she's already taken me out to lunch one time and explained to me what I should be doing to further my career. So, yeah they definitely are willing, I think they are willing to do that, well they have done that a few times for me now and I want to call upon them again.

Interviewer

Do you think your work community reduces any feelings of isolation in completing your work?

Interviewee

Not really. This state is sort of an isolated place, but I never feel that personally isolated you know. The tools we need to do our job, for my job generally is, I need some data, which ... can get from the Australian Bureau of statistics, it doesn't matter if I'm in here or not; you know I could be anywhere in the state or anywhere in the world. As long as I had an internet connection and an email I'd be able to get hold of it. By attending the national economics conferences I feel

like I am part of an in group of economists of Australia, I feel like I'm not isolated. Sometimes people say "Oh you're so isolated down there". I say, "Well I see you almost every year and I don't feel isolated in any way." And amongst the University I mean, the only ... it's a small group of Economists in my field, you know our School is not that big, and sometimes I suppose we feel a little bit isolated in the Faculty in the whole, each of the disciplines is very different so we all feel a little bit isolated in that sense. But in general it doesn't impose on me. I suppose occasionally there are some seminars in Melbourne and Sydney that I would like to go to, and I mean I could. Except once I factor in travel and accommodation instead of it just being a few hundred dollars to attend the seminar it seems like becoming a thousand dollars or so to attend the seminar. And often I could probably ask the Head of School to go but then I often think the travel time as well. I suppose that's the only time that I think the isolation comes in, otherwise I would be attending a few more of the those seminars in the capital cities all over the mainland.

Interviewer

Can you discuss with your colleagues any negative feelings you might have regarding your School or Faculty?

Interviewee

Yeah, we often have little bitches and gripes, we normally are OK, and there's not that much but we normally do, I suppose this might sound bad but it's my little gripe that the students didn't give a fair effort, they've done really badly in a piece of assessment ... There use to be a fair bit of griping at the leadership of the Faculty. That was several years ago, probably five years ago. I don't think many people were happy with the Dean that we had then, they seemed to not understand the pressure that the academics were under and would often laugh off our problems which wasn't very nice when we were sweating and there didn't seem to be much money flowing down to the Schools to recruit new people. Whereas in

the last five, three, four or five years it's been much better, the money's been coming to the Schools and we've been able to hire more staff and get working again. So there hasn't been that many sort of gripes to worry about. There might be the odd little gripe about leadership at the School level, but I don't know. When I hear them I think there's a little there. It might be as in it is not a fair assessment and often it's more that point that when someone might be gripping at me I say "Well you had to do that because of this, this and this or ... and that's why it works". And certainly I probably have the odd gripe too and I might say to some of my other colleagues. "Well, you have to do it that way because...", and there's normally a reason for it, so yeah we (sort of) discuss it a little bit and often it can help either make each other understand why the policy or why they acted that way.

Interviewer

In general, can the university be seen as a learning community? In light of your answer above, how about within your Faculty or your School?

Interviewee

Well there's certain aspects where it is, it is great sort of size as a learning community I suppose the Teaching Matters conference can teach each other different teaching techniques and I certainly picked up one technique from there once. Little other little things I've been on, I suppose little seminars on how to write research grants and they are tailored very well at covering all different types of disciplines and that was a little learning community in there I suppose across the University in how to write grants. So there are various aspects of it, but I suppose ... um I feel like a lot of the learning that can be done is quite discipline specific and most of the time listening to other disciplines I find, while it is interesting I find it is unsuitable for what we want to use here. So I find the strongest learning community is within the School and it sort of gets weaker as you get further and further away from the School. So really strong in the School, a

bit weaker in the Faculty then as it gets further out sort of less and less of a learning community in that sense.

Interviewer

How does your answer to the question about a learning community fit with the mission of the University?

Interviewee

Again, I'm sorry have you got that Mission statement from the University there? I've remembered the Faculty one seems to be about ... Well I did provide some leadership with the ... committee; I think it does a reasonably good job at that but. To me it feels it started at each sort of School level, each ... School professor or something might make a commitment in the community. To tell you the truth, I don't really see how the University Mission statement relates to the learning communities much. Well creation, preservation, communication, application of knowledge – well I suppose that is true but ... I don't really focus much on the University as a whole that much, I more focus on the School and the Faculty, we're so busy with doing that.

Interviewer

Are you aware of any online collaboration in your workplace?

Interviewee

Online collaboration? No I don't think I am, sorry. Maybe there is? Oh well, there's some little bits I look at ... That's not online really. No, no, I suppose not really.

Interviewer

What factors do you think contributed the most to the evolving of a learning community in the Faculty or University level over the years?

Interviewee

Some of it is sort of almost out of necessity; you need to get some ideas off somebody. Maybe you're stuck with how to teach a certain thing or how to research a certain thing so some of it is quite; it's more out of necessity then ... I'm stuck I don't know how to do this bit or how to write this section up and I'll go and talk to a colleague about it. So some of it is often out of necessity, and so that is the strongest drive for it. And then there is another side to it where you just get it more passively by going to a forum or going to a conference or going to a thing on how to write research grants where you sit back and let the information come to you and pick the little bits out. But I find when it is formed out of necessity its normally stronger and more relevant and more appropriate.

Interviewer

Thank you for your help. I value it very much.

Appendix J Cross-cultural Differences and Similarities in Stakeholders'
Perceptions

Appendix J1 Australian University compared with Chinese University

Appendix J2 Australian Business compared with Chinese Business

Appendix J1 Comparison Responses to Questionnaire by University Business Academic Staff by Nationality (marked by significance levels)

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 17		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
5. Would you say that your university prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?	2.64	0.63	2.00	0.00	20.886	.000***
6. Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff?	2.71	0.69	2.05	0.22	16.317	.000***
8. Do you agree that academics are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university?	2.60	0.63	2.00	0.00	18.184	.000***
12. My university is a learning community where goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.	3.06	1.39	4.50	0.51	18.586	.000***
17. Faculty and administrators guide staff towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.	3.00	1.03	4.75	0.44	46.864	.000***
18. Learning is a natural process and my university provides opportunities to facilitate it.	3.59	0.87	4.70	0.47	24.362	.000***

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 17		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
20. My university has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	2.94	1.09	4.70	0.47	42.994	.000***
21. My university is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	3.18	1.13	4.70	0.47	30.260	.000***
22. My university community is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.	3.29	1.05	4.85	0.37	38.775	.000***
23. My university provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	4.00	0.79	4.90	0.31	22.077	.000***
33. I agree that commitment is part of our university identity as a community.	3.53	0.94	4.75	0.44	26.642	.000***
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	3.12	1.27	4.65	0.59	23.370	.000***
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	2.94	1.14	4.55	0.60	29.847	.000***
39. In my work, the university has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	2.63	1.09	4.60	0.68	44.401	.000***
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	3.41	1.37	4.60	0.60	12.300	.001***
34. I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	3.94	0.66	4.65	0.59	11.978	.001***

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 17		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	3.94	0.97	4.75	0.44	11.257	.002**
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	3.53	1.18	4.55	0.69	10.742	.002**
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university community are engaged.	3.82	0.73	4.60	0.68	11.228	.002**
4. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university?	2.35	0.49	2.00	0.00	10.319	.003**
24. My university gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.	3.82	1.13	4.70	0.47	10.015	.003**
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	3.76	1.09	4.65	0.59	9.843	.003**
16. The ways in which university members work and learn together are crucial to the development of university community.	4.12	0.86	4.80	0.52	8.827	.005**
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.	3.82	1.01	4.60	0.60	8.333	.007**
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	3.82	1.07	4.60	0.60	7.673	.009**
13. Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals.	3.18	1.29	4.00	0.65	6.328	.017*

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 17		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
7. Would you say classifying some staff as ‘excellent’ is used to encourage others’ motivation in my university?	2.41	0.62	2.05	0.22	5.956	.020*
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	4.00	1.00	4.60	0.60	5.078	.031*
2. Do you understand the vision and mission of the university?	2.94	0.75	3.40	0.50	4.927	.033*
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process.	4.06	1.03	4.65	0.59	4.785	.035*
19. My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow.	4.00	0.97	4.55	0.60	4.364	.044*
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	4.06	0.97	4.60	0.60	4.333	.045*
27. My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.	3.94	0.97	4.50	0.76	3.872	.057
28. I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.	4.06	1.03	4.55	0.60	3.248	.080
3. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	3.00	0.00	2.85	0.37	2.838	.101
9. Do academics see their seniors as figures of authority?	2.88	1.02	3.30	0.66	2.279	.140
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed	2.80	1.01	3.20	0.77	1.768	.193

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 17		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
discipline in the university?						
1. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with the university work context?	2.65	0.61	2.45	0.51	1.153	.290
10. Do you agree that academics are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	2.88	1.02	2.65	0.67	0.630	.433
14. The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board.	3.53	1.33	3.21	1.08	0.628	.434

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix J2 Comparison Responses to Questionnaire by Business Stakeholders by Nationality

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 13		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
2. Do you understand the vision and mission of the company?	3.92	0.28	3.20	0.52	20.855	.000***
4. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the company?	3.38	0.87	2.20	0.41	27.918	.000***
8. Do you agree that employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my company?	4.00	0.00	2.65	0.49	97.831	.000***
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	2.85	0.99	4.10	1.02	12.193	.001***
14. My company's goals should be established by the governing body of the company.	4.23	0.83	3.05	1.10	10.894	.002**
23. My company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	3.77	0.83	4.60	0.60	11.158	.002**
3. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	3.46	0.88	2.60	0.68	10.054	.003**
12. My company is a learning organisation and the goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.	3.77	1.09	4.70	0.57	10.318	.003**
22. My company is aware of the importance of	3.85	1.07	4.75	0.55	10.263	.003**

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 13		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
continuous learning to promote ongoing improvement.						
19. My company setting requires employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market.	3.08	1.32	4.30	1.08	8.473	.007**
33. I agree that commitment is part of our company identity as a community.	3.92	1.12	4.70	0.47	7.709	.009**
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	3.77	0.83	4.55	0.76	7.731	.009**
24. My company provides opportunities for a sharing of ideas and being engaged with others.	3.77	0.93	4.45	0.69	5.878	.021*
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my work place.	3.62	0.96	4.35	0.81	5.579	.025*
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the business community are engaged.	3.69	0.85	4.30	0.66	5.315	.028*
7. Would you say classifying some staff as 'excellent' is used to encourage others' motivation in my company?	2.77	1.01	2.20	0.41	5.103	.031*
17. Administrators/Executive officers guide employees towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge in my company.	3.15	1.14	4.05	1.10	5.076	.031*
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the company?	2.77	1.01	3.50	0.89	4.776	.037*
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	3.15	1.14	3.95	1.15	3.809	.060

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 13		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
9. Do employees see their administrators as figures of authority?	2.77	1.01	3.40	0.94	3.339	.077
34. I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	3.69	1.03	4.35	1.04	3.171	.085
10. Do you agree that employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	2.15	0.55	2.60	0.94	2.372	.134
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	4.08	0.76	4.50	0.83	2.194	.149
5. Would you say that your company prefers to employ those who have completed a tertiary level course?	2.46	0.88	2.15	0.37	2.012	.166
1. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with your work context?	2.54	0.66	2.20	0.77	1.703	.202
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	3.69	0.85	4.15	1.09	1.634	.211
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	3.38	1.04	3.90	1.21	1.587	.217
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	4.00	0.82	4.40	0.99	1.458	.236
39. In my work, the company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	3.46	1.20	3.90	1.07	1.203	.281
28. I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.	4.08	0.64	4.35	0.93	0.848	.364

Question	Australian <i>n</i> = 13		Chinese <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process to support business processes and efficiencies.	4.00	1.00	4.30	0.86	0.839	.367
16. The ways in which staff work and learn together are crucial to the development of business community.	4.08	0.64	4.35	0.99	0.776	.385
6. Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?	2.33	0.78	2.20	0.41	0.405	.529
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	3.85	0.90	3.60	1.23	0.384	.540
13. The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals.	4.00	0.82	4.20	1.11	0.313	.580
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	3.46	1.05	3.65	1.14	0.230	.635
27. My company allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.	3.92	0.76	4.05	1.05	0.141	.710
20. My company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	4.31	0.75	4.40	0.94	0.088	.768
21. My company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	4.15	0.90	4.20	1.24	0.013	.909
18. Learning is a natural process and my company provides opportunities to facilitate it.	3.85	0.80	3.85	1.39	0.000	.993

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix K Interdisciplinary Differences and Similarities in Stakeholders'
Perceptions

Appendix K1 Chinese University compared with Chinese Business

Appendix K2 Australian University compared with Australian Business

Appendix K1 Comparison Responses to Questionnaire by Chinese by Occupation

Question	University <i>n</i> = 20		Business <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
8. Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?	2.00	0.00	2.65	0.49	35.286	.000***
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	4.60	0.60	3.65	1.14	10.939	.002**
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	4.60	0.60	3.60	1.23	10.674	.002**
17. Faculty and administrators/Executive officers guide staff/employees towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.	4.75	0.44	4.05	1.10	6.974	.012*
18. Learning is a natural process and my university/company provides opportunities to facilitate it.	4.70	0.47	3.85	1.39	6.737	.013*
39. In my work, the university/company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	4.60	0.68	3.90	1.07	6.085	.018*

Question	University <i>n</i> = 20		Business <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	4.65	0.59	3.95	1.15	5.911	.020*
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	4.75	0.44	4.15	1.09	5.202	.028*
4. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?	2.00	0.00	2.20	0.41	4.750	.036*
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	4.55	0.69	3.90	1.21	4.369	.043*
23. My university/company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	4.90	0.31	4.60	0.60	3.977	.053
5. Would you say that your university/company prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?	2.00	0.00	2.15	0.37	3.353	.075
16. The ways in which university/staff members work and learn together are crucial to the development of university/business community.	4.80	0.52	4.35	0.99	3.240	.080
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	4.55	0.60	4.10	1.02	2.877	.098
21. My university/company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	4.70	0.47	4.20	1.24	2.844	.100
27. My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and	4.50	0.76	4.05	1.05	2.408	.129

Question	University <i>n</i> = 20		Business <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
skills from other people.						
3. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	2.85	0.37	2.60	0.68	2.093	.156
6. Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff? /Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?	2.05	0.22	2.20	0.41	2.060	.159
7. Would you say classifying some staff as ‘excellent’ is used to encourage others’ motivation in my university/company?	2.05	0.22	2.20	0.41	2.060	.159
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university/business community are engaged.	4.60	0.68	4.30	0.66	2.012	.164
24. My university/company gives me an outlet for sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.	4.70	0.47	4.45	0.69	1.806	.187
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which arise in my learning process.	4.65	0.59	4.35	0.81	1.791	.189
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.	4.60	0.60	4.30	0.86	1.629	.210

Question	University <i>n</i> = 20		Business <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
20. My university/company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	4.70	0.47	4.40	0.94	1.629	.210
2. Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?	3.40	0.50	3.20	0.52	1.520	.225
1. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with your work context?	2.45	0.51	2.20	0.77	1.471	.233
12. My university/company is a learning community where goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.	4.50	0.51	4.70	0.57	1.357	.251
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the university/company?	3.20	0.77	3.50	0.89	1.305	.260
34. I trust my colleagues' critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	4.65	0.59	4.35	1.04	1.262	.268
19. My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow/my company requires employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market	4.55	0.60	4.30	1.08	0.815	.372
28. I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.	4.55	0.60	4.35	0.93	0.647	.426
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	4.60	0.60	4.40	0.99	0.594	.446

Question	University <i>n</i> = 20		Business <i>n</i> = 20		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
13. Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals/The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals	4.00	0.65	4.20	1.11	0.487	.489
22. My university/company is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.	4.85	0.37	4.75	0.55	0.458	.503
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	4.65	0.59	4.55	0.76	0.217	.644
14. The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board/My company's goals should be established by the governing body of the company	3.21	1.08	3.05	1.10	0.211	.649
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	4.60	0.60	4.50	0.83	0.192	.664
9. Do academics/employees see their seniors as figures of authority?	3.30	0.66	3.40	0.94	0.152	.699
33. I agree that commitment is part of our university/company identity as a community.	4.75	0.44	4.70	0.47	0.119	.731
10. Do you agree that academics/employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	2.65	0.67	2.60	0.94	0.037	.848

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix K2 Comparison Responses to Questionnaire by Australian by Occupation

Question	University <i>n</i> = 17		Business <i>n</i> = 13		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
2. Do you understand the vision and mission of the university/company?	2.94	0.75	3.92	0.28	20.160	.000***
4. To what degree can you identify a sort of learning culture in the university/company?	2.35	0.49	3.38	0.87	16.941	.000***
8. Do you agree that academics/employees are entitled to an amount of time-off to participate in learning and access learning materials freely in my university/company?	2.60	0.63	4.00	0.00	63.375	.000***
20. My university/company has a shared vision and explicit set of values and they are known by all members.	2.94	1.09	4.31	0.75	14.981	.001***
21. My university/company is committed to and continuously reaching towards its mission.	3.18	1.13	4.15	0.90	6.532	.016*
10. Do you agree that academics/employees are cowed by higher authorities or are treated as subservient?	2.88	1.02	2.15	0.55	5.180	.031*
3. In what sense would you describe your workplace as surrounded by colleagues who are different from you in terms of nationality, religion and/or culture?	3.00	0.00	3.46	0.88	4.760	.038*
19. My university is required to prepare staff for the challenges of tomorrow/my company requires	4.00	0.97	3.08	1.32	4.725	.039*

Question	University <i>n</i> = 17		Business <i>n</i> = 13		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
employees to be prepared for the ever-changing job market						
13. Academics' learning performance need to be aligned to support our university goals/The people and the learning that they do support our company's goals	3.18	1.29	4.00	0.82	4.058	.054
39. In my work, the university/company has fostered a learning community where the leader facilitated the learning of all staff members.	2.63	1.09	3.46	1.20	3.874	.059
14. The university goals should be established by the University Council and/or Board/My company's goals should be established by the governing body of the company	3.53	1.33	4.23	0.83	2.777	.107
12. My university/company is a learning community where goals are organisational growth, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness.	3.06	1.39	3.77	1.09	2.301	.141
22. My university/company is engaged in an ongoing cycle of continuous improvement.	3.29	1.05	3.85	1.07	2.013	.167
6. Do you agree that competitive learning is a tool to be used to increase learning among staff? /Do you agree that a competitive ethos pervades all sectors of my company to enable learning?	2.71	0.69	2.33	0.78	1.857	.184
25. I can reflect on and explore issues or ideas which	4.06	1.03	3.62	0.96	1.448	.239

Question	University <i>n</i> = 17		Business <i>n</i> = 13		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
arise in my learning process.						
7. Would you say classifying some staff as ‘excellent’ is used to encourage others’ motivation in my university/company?	2.41	0.62	2.77	1.01	1.430	.242
33. I agree that commitment is part of our university/company identity as a community.	3.53	0.94	3.92	1.12	1.096	.304
18. Learning is a natural process and my university/company provides opportunities to facilitate it.	3.59	0.87	3.85	0.80	0.693	.412
34. I trust my colleagues’ critical feedback and respect their support of my work.	3.94	0.66	3.69	1.03	0.648	.428
23. My university/company provides opportunities for mutual interaction and engagement with colleagues.	4.00	0.79	3.77	0.83	0.600	.445
26. I prefer to work with my close colleagues to focus on learning to produce desired outcomes.	3.94	0.97	3.69	0.85	0.539	.469
5. Would you say that your university/company prefers to employ those who have completed appropriate formal qualification?	2.64	0.63	2.46	0.88	0.384	.541
15. Learning is viewed as an ongoing process that goes beyond the traditional learning methods to making sense of knowledge.	3.82	1.01	4.00	1.00	0.226	.638
1. In general, to what extent are you satisfied with your	2.65	0.61	2.54	0.66	0.219	.644

Question	University <i>n</i> = 17		Business <i>n</i> = 13		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
work context?						
40. Innovative new knowledge is produced when members in the university/business community are engaged.	3.82	0.73	3.69	0.85	0.206	.653
17. Faculty and administrators/Executive officers guide staff/employees towards creating their own individual repertoire of knowledge.	3.00	1.03	3.15	1.14	0.145	.707
30. I have been encouraged to participate actively in learning.	3.53	1.18	3.38	1.04	0.122	.729
9. Do academics/employees see their seniors as figures of authority?	2.88	1.02	2.77	1.01	0.077	.783
36. My work community reduced my feelings of isolation and helped me come to terms with negative emotions.	2.94	1.14	2.85	0.99	0.057	.813
31. I have helped others to solve issues related to our work.	4.00	1.00	4.08	0.76	0.053	.819
32. I have helped a colleague even if when it was not my job.	4.06	0.97	4.00	0.82	0.031	.861
16. The ways in which university/staff members work and learn together are crucial to the development of university/business community.	4.12	0.86	4.08	0.64	0.020	.887
24. My university/company gives me an outlet for	3.82	1.13	3.77	0.93	0.020	.889

Question	University <i>n</i> = 17		Business <i>n</i> = 13		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
sharing similar learning interests and being engaged with others.						
29. I have been encouraged throughout the work that I have conducted.	3.41	1.37	3.46	1.05	0.012	.914
35. My work has been improved in a caring, productive and supportive environment.	3.12	1.27	3.15	1.14	0.007	.936
11. Have you been subjected to externally imposed discipline in the university/company?	2.80	1.01	2.77	1.01	0.006	.937
38. I am able to discuss topics with both experienced and inexperienced people in my work.	3.82	1.07	3.85	0.90	0.004	.952
27. My workplace allowed me to learn new ideas and skills from other people.	3.94	0.97	3.92	0.76	0.003	.956
28. I am able to think critically from new perspectives about the topic that I have been working on.	4.06	1.03	4.08	0.64	0.003	.956
37. I have been able to develop my personal relationships with other colleagues.	3.76	1.09	3.77	0.83	0.000	.990

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix L Factor Loading on Criteria

Criteria	Item No	Item	Factor Loading	Factor name
LCC1	02	mission understanding	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC1	13	incentives aligned goals	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC1	20	shared vision	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC1	21	reaching mission continuously	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC2	04	learning culture	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC2	12	goals to growth	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC2	15	ongoing learning	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC2	22	engaged ongoing improvement	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC2	33	commitment is identity	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC3	03	multi-culture	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC3	05	entrance	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC3	06	competitive	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC3	07	motivation	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC3	16	significance of collaboration	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC3	29	be encouraged to work	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC3	30	be encouraged to learn	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC3	31	helped others related to work	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC3	32	helped others non-related work	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC3	34	trust and respect colleagues	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC3	35	caring environment	Factor One	development perceptions

Criteria	Item No	Item	Factor Loading	Factor name
LCC4	09	figures of authority	Factor Three	leadership and authority
LCC4	10	bossed around	Factor Three	leadership and authority
LCC4	11	external-discipline	Factor Three	leadership and authority
LCC4	14	goals establishment	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC4	17	supportive leaders	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC4	18	natural learning supported	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC4	19	future preparation	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC4	36	belonging	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC4	39	leaders support learning	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC5	08	freedom	Factor Two	collegial environment
LCC5	25	able to explore issues	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC5	27	able to learn	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC5	28	able to think critically	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC5	37	relationships developing	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC5	38	opportunities to discuss issues	Factor Four	constructive practice
LCC5	40	innovative knowledge produced	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC6	23	mutual interaction encouraged	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC6	24	engagement encouraged	Factor One	development perceptions
LCC6	26	cooperate in proximity	Factor Four	constructive practice

Appendix M Publication related to this Thesis

Appendix M1 International Refereed Conference Proceeding: A copy of refereed paper published in proceeding of international conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 27 November – Thursday 1 December, 2011

Appendix M2 International Refereed Journal: A copy of refereed paper presented at the Fifth International Conference on Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, University of Cambridge, England, UK, 2 August – 5 August, 2010, and published in the International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, 5(9), 163-176

Appendix M1 International Refereed Conference Proceeding

Yang, Y. & Williamson, J. (2011). A critical lens on learning communities: An international comparative study of higher education practice. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual international conference, November, 2011, Hobart Australia
Paper Code: 00380

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Appendix M2 International Refereed Journal

Yang, Y. & Williamson, J. (2010). A Cross-cultural Study of Learning Communities in Academic and Business Contexts. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 5(9), 163-176.

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